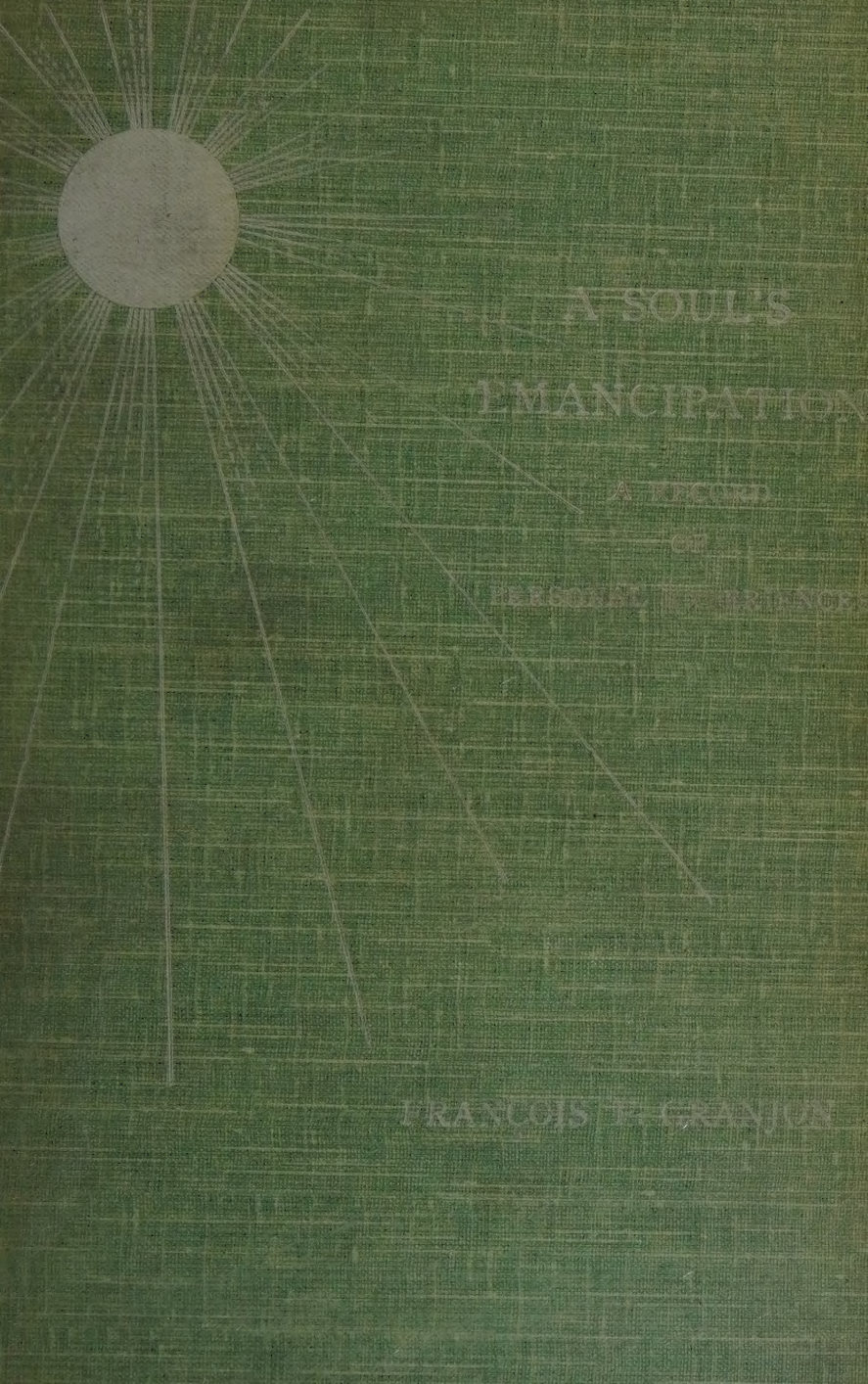
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A SOUL'S EMANCIPATION

A Record of Personal Experiences

BY

FRANÇOIS F. GRANJON

FORMERLY PRIEST IN THE CHURCH OF ROME, NOW PASTEUR IN THE REFORMED CHURCH OF FRANCE AT PUYS S. MARTIN

Translated from the French

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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LONDON

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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INTRODUCTION

I HAVE been asked to write an introduction to the narrative which follows. I do so with much pleasure, not only because I have had the honour of making M. Granjon's acquaintance, but because the subject of his work is one of the utmost importance, to ourselves as well as to our fellow-Christians on the Continent. It is of importance to them, because it is clear that the edifice reared with such pains by the Ultramontanes is crumbling to pieces under the influence of modern ideas. They will have, however, to find 'new wine' for the 'new bottles' of modern revolt against Rome. On the Continent, and especially in France, the organizations which confront Rome, with the exception of the 'Old Catholic' body, present religion either under the shape which the reaction against Rome took in the sixteenth century, or else in an amount of freedom from dogmatic definitions which is equivalent to a rejection of the Christian revelation. The subject of M. Granjon's story is also of importance to ourselves, because for many long years the English mind, and especially the mind of the English clergy, has been under strange delusions as to the real nature of Romanism, and we have been steadily urged to look towards Rome for the influences which shall purify the life of the English nation.

As we have sedulously been informed, our religious services, the training of our clergy, the doctrine preached from our pulpits and imparted to the rising generation, should be, if not actually Romanized, yet at least strongly tinctured by Roman ideas, if we are to bring our countrymen to 'the obedience of Christ.' The delusion is costing us dear. The approach, though it be never so distant, to the Roman seminary system in some of our theological colleges is steadily alienating the English laity from our Church. As almost the blindest person among us may see, the enthusiasm displayed when the question of Disestablishment was brought to the front in 1885 has sensibly declined. And the reason is not far to seek. The enthusiasm of our laity for their Church has decreased precisely in proportion to the extent to which a favourable feeling towards Rome has laid hold, more or less, on our Bishops and the clergy. It is therefore essential that we should no longer allow ourselves to be misled, but should understand exactly what the Roman system of priestly training is, and what are its effects on those subjected to it, and on the world outside.

This is what M. Granjon's story does for us. It appeared originally in the *Chrétien Français*, the organ of the French seceding priests, under the name of 'Le Roman d'une Conscience.' It is a perfect photograph, so to speak, of the system on which a French priest is trained. It is understood, unless I am much mistaken, to represent, in all essential respects, the experience of M. Granjon himself. I venture to think that English readers are indebted to Mr. Faithfull for having presented it to them in an attractive English form.

M. Granjon does not enter upon the results of the Roman system of priestly training upon the religious life of his countrymen. I may therefore be forgiven if I attempt

to supply this deficiency. Since 1895 a large number of French priests have laid aside their office. A year ago that number had exceeded eight hundred. It cannot by this time amount to much less than a thousand. I have read the letters of resignation of more than one hundred of them. They all tell the same tale. They speak with one consent of the illusions fostered in the seminary, and of the shock which awaited them when a stern experience forced upon them the contrast between the seminary ideal and the facts of life. And the effect of priestly work, as conducted on Ultramontane lines, upon the religious life of the French nation is nothing short of appalling. The great French orator, M. Hyacinthe Loyson, has publicly declared that though a considerable number of Frenchmen and Frenchwomen are what in England we once called 'Occasional Conformists,' there are not two millions of French people who habitually live according to the rules of their Church. M. Yves Guyot, the well-known French politician, has repeated that statement, and has given figures in support of it. I have not seen those figures, and have, of course, no means of checking them; but when put forward by a public man of M. Yves Guyot's known ability and honesty they cannot be lightly set aside. And they are supported by the fact of the utter collapse of Ultramontane resistance to the Bill for the suppression of the Congregations, by the unresisted and irresistible approach of the separation of Church and State, and by the open laments of the French Ultramontane party itself. To what is all this due? Not, surely, to the innate and inveterate capacity for wickedness of the French nation. At least *some* other causes must have concurred to effect this startling divorce between France and its National Church. It is surely conceivable that to the natural depravity of the human race must be added some failure on the part of that National Church to do its duty, some errors

in its system which must be removed before it can fulfil its mission.

The most extraordinary feature of the ecclesiastical situation in England is the utter incapacity displayed by those among us who undertake to instruct and guide our Church to understand the religious situation in France. The expulsion of the religious Orders in the latter country is represented among ourselves as a cruel persecution of innocent and holy men for professing and teaching the Roman Catholic religion. As a matter of fact, it was an uprising of the French people against a class of persons who were getting immensely rich at the public expense, who were amassing their riches, among other modes of obtaining funds, by the manufacture of liqueurs, by conducting schools and laundries, by the cruel exploitation of the labour of the young, the weak, and the poor, whom they had collected ostensibly for charitable purposes, and their ill-treatment of whom they managed to conceal by evading inspection; and who were employing the riches so amassed for the benefit of a foreign power, and for the overthrow of the government under which they lived. These assertions do not rest on 'the hare-brained chatter of irresponsible frivolity.' The first accusation, as to the way in which the money of many—of course, not all—of the Congregations was obtained, rests upon undeniable facts; among others, upon the public records of the courts of law in France, some extracts from which were made accessible to the English public in an article by M. St. Genix, published in the *Contemporary Review* some few years back. The second, as to the way in which the money was spent, came out amid the extraordinary revelations of the celebrated Dreyfus case. But to these facts, though patent to the world at large, those who belong to certain ecclesiastical

circles among us remain absolutely blind. Whether it be the blindness of those who cannot or of those who will not see I do not undertake to determine. A similar blindness leads some people to believe that the French people is apostatizing from Christianity, whereas it is simply recoiling from the absurd superstitions the Roman Church is presenting to them in its place.

Those, however, who study M. Granjon's narrative cannot fail to be enlightened as to the actual state of things in the Roman Church. There is no unkindly feeling expressed in it for those whom he has left behind, no sweeping accusation of immorality or conscious dishonesty on the part of the French clergy. They are, on the whole, conscientious and honest, according to their lights. But the system which creates them, and of which they ultimately come to be the administrators, rests on a basis which is radically false. It rests on the notion that the Church and the world are essentially opposed to each other, instead of on the idea that the world has become corrupted, and that it is the task of the Spirit of Christ to drive the corruption out. It proceeds on the theory of the incompatibility of nature and grace, and the necessity of the destruction of the former by the latter. Science, or the knowledge of the world as it is, must of necessity be an evil, because the old Manichæan dualism still permeates the Roman Church, and leads it to represent the world as belonging to the devil, and not to God. And so the seminary system aims, not at the regulation, but at the suppression, of natural desires, even of the most innocent kind. It endeavours to subject the individual to the system, to make the priest into a part of a vast machine, with neither a will nor motive power of his own. And as nature, when repressed, must of necessity have its revenges, the priest comes out of his

seminary, not a healthy, natural human being, but an artificially-regulated creation.

The seminary life, moreover, in spite of the noble ideals it seeks to foster, degenerates practically into a squalid routine of petty tyranny, of continual repression, of favouritism, of espionage, of intrigue, of meanness, of deceit. And this state of things pervades the whole Roman communion. Readers of Purcell's 'Life of Cardinal Manning' were astounded to find it busily at work among those who pull the strings at the Vatican. This spirit must necessarily be at war with mankind. It is in eternal conflict with the principles on which God has seen fit to redeem and to purify us. For while Christianity aims at the sanctification of the individual through the indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and thus at the aggregation of a 'peculiar people, zealous of good works,' the Roman Church reverses the process, and aims at the suppression of all individuality—the submission of the people to the priest, the priest to the Bishop, the Bishop to the Pope, and the Pope, as is fondly supposed, to Jesus Christ. The two systems, the Christian and the Papal, are thus in fundamental opposition. That they have the same end in view may be very readily conceded. But there is a right and a wrong way of attaining that end. If the Christian Scriptures are right, the Roman is the wrong way. And though many within the Roman fold have the best intentions, their methods are too often fatal to their purposes. In proportion as our knowledge increases, our sense of the incompatibility between Roman aims and Roman ends becomes daily more pronounced. Save where a powerful Protestant majority saves Rome from herself, the failure of Romanism to fulfil the purpose of Christ becomes continually more evident, more disastrous, and more universal.

In the pages which follow these remarks will be very fully illustrated. I can only trust that the lesson they contain will be very widely taken to heart. We are not likely, happily, to adopt the seminary system here in all its fulness. Our boys, whether intended for Holy Orders or for any other vocation, will still continue to be educated together. But an attempt is being made in certain quarters to fill up the deficiencies in the ranks of our clergy by selecting youths from our national schools, carefully isolating them after a certain age, and training them to vows of 'poverty, chastity' — whatever that may mean — 'and obedience.' What the results of this are likely to be the present volume will tell us. If introduced, its failure here will be even more disastrous, because more emphatically in conflict with English public opinion, than that of the seminary system in France. But it may be questioned whether the higher ideal of clerical life admittedly introduced by the Tractarian movement has been altogether a gain. There is something to be said in favour of the old English country parson—yes, even for the *sporting* parson. He was at least a man among men, and his presence in the hunting-field and on the bench of magistrates was at least a recognition of the holiness of common, as his marriage was of family, life. The re-introduction among us of the priestly ideal has had its dangers, and I fear they are increasing. Personally, I do not believe it to be necessary to the perfection of the clerical character. It is possible to interpose too wide an interval between the cleric and the layman. As a pupil of Maurice and a disciple of Kingsley, I would seriously dissuade my brethren in the English Church from making too definite a separation between the Church and the world. This world belongs to God as well as the next. The supernatural is the complement, not the antithesis, of the

natural. Monasticism is not the expression, but the contradiction, of the Christian ideal. While the Church of Rome aims at the annihilation or suppression of nature, the Christian religion urges us to its consecration and perfection. The Christian clergyman must therefore be the highest representation, not the negation, of the ideal layman.

J. J. Lias.

PREFACE

To those whom I could once address as 'Brother-Priests'

FOR you, whom I shall always regard with feelings of friendliness and affection, I have written these pages: not in self-defence, for I seek no further approval than that of my own conscience, which acquits me; nor with any desire for literary fame, for I lack the qualifications of a successful romancer. It is for your sakes alone that I try to set down, with entire frankness, the struggles of a priest's soul, grappling at first with doubt, by-and-by seeing clearly, but even then hesitating, held back by the close ties of friendship.

We have all been subjected to that strong and subtle influence of a seminary education, which, penetrating every fibre of the mind, adulterates doctrines, falsifies duty, and strangles the noblest energies. To many this masterful influence of the Church is a mystery, but it is an active force of terrible power. And I was its victim.

After loyally pursuing for a short season the Pauline counsel, that it is 'better to marry than to burn,' I fell back into the darkness of Roman error, all the while honestly believing that I was advancing towards the light. I left my young wife with her relations, and entered the cloister.

You alone are able thoroughly to understand how I could do this conscientiously, for the sake both of love and of duty. For the sake of love! Never did a couple live more closely united in mutual confidence and affection. Only a very powerful motive indeed could have separated us. And this all-powerful motive was found, and applied, by the priest who for ten years had been the guide and director of my conscience. 'Both of you,' said he, 'are in the way of damnation. The highest proof of love would be to leave her, so that by severing your ties she may once again be set in the way of salvation.' To save my beloved from hell, I, in agony of soul, sacrificed my portion of earthly happiness.

But also for the sake of duty! I had, it is true, a duty towards my wife. But to the *natural* right, which created this duty, there was opposed what claimed to be a *Divine* right creating a contrary duty. So, thinking to abide in God by fulfilling the higher duty, I, after a grievous inward struggle, mustered courage to crush down my affections, and to sentence myself to the penal servitude of the cloister.

There are others also who, on their way to the liberty of the Gospel, have had to trample upon hearts, even upon a father's or a mother's corpse. But I, trampling upon my own heart, went forth to the serfdom where, by God's grace, the truth which makes us free was to shine with unclouded brightness on mine eyes.

If in repudiating my vows I had only sought to change my way of living, these pages would never have been written. But I sought *life itself;* and now I have found it; and with truth I have found peace—a 'peace which passeth all understanding' (Phil. iv. 7).

May God help me in my task of laying before you, in their growth and development, these experiences of a sincere and troubled soul.

This, Abbé Fleury, who resembles me as closely as any twin brother, is also a type of you all. And I long for the day when you, too, will feel that there is a new world of liberty and life beyond the slavery and death of the Roman communion.

Surely the day will come when you also will fully recognise that you are bound in that slavery. I loved it as dearly as any of you now do, while I believed it to be the will of God and under His benediction.

The purpose of this story of 'A Soul's Emancipation' is to awaken in you the consciousness of your lost liberty, and to arouse in you the longing to be free.

May the Divine blessing richly attend my friendly endeavour!

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CHAPTER I

AT THE CLERICAL SCHOOL

THE town of Loirolles,[1] where the hero of this story was born, is perhaps the most devout place in the most devout French diocese. Here, year out, year in, about a hundred thousand 'acts of communion'[2] are made. Here *La Croix*[3] and the confessional tyrannize with rigour. Thence in less than thirty years there have gone forth more than four score priests; and year by year an exodus of young girls moves out to people the convents of the neighbourhood.

Little Charles Fleury was eleven and a half years old when his confessor, the vicar[4] of the parish, decided that he was to become a priest. Even earlier than this a Lenten preacher, a Dominican monk, had wanted to enrol him.

His father was an 'overlooker' in a factory, and the boy was adored by both his parents, who were a contented couple, with minds well disposed towards the Church, although each in a different manner and degree. The father, having been baptized into the Catholic Church in

[1] Population 14,000.

[2] The sum of the number of communicants at all the celebrations held throughout the year—*i.e.*, seven per head per annum, for man, woman, and child in the town.

[3] The title of a newspaper much read by French Roman Catholics.

[4] The assistant of the Curé.

infancy, was so far a Catholic; and although he failed to make use of all the Sacraments[1] of the Church, he was unquestionably an honest and upright man. The mother, as good a woman as could be found, had a religious belief which bordered on credulity. She was a woman of simple faith, utterly unsuspicious of any falsehood in the priests, and placing a blind confidence in her confessor. Charles, a frank and ingenuous boy, was attracted to the Church by the pomp of her ceremonial, was awed by the music of her psalmody, and was all reverence and obedience.

Already, for more than a year, Abbé Peyrard[2] had laid claim to the lad. He was one of those simple-minded priests, sincere and fanatical, who made it a point of honour to develop vocations, and possibly was proud of his success. This kind of man—by no means a rare type of the 'brooding priest' of young souls—is one of the obscure, but real, forces of the Church of Rome in its underground working.

Charles had taken this priest's fancy. Artless and quickwitted, ingenuous as a girl, with a nature both eager and reverent, he attracted the priest's attention at the catechizings.

As the Abbé Peyrard was confessor to the mother, he wished also to be confessor to the son. Through her influence this was easily arranged, and so, in the protecting shadow of the confessional, the Abbé began to lay the first foundations of his influence. Gentle and fatherly, the priest quickly won the child's confidence. What else could one expect from a nature so trusting and innocent, which flowed out unconsciously to all that was good and great? So when, after months of interviews at the confessional, during which the greatness of the priesthood had been exalted in

[1] There are seven Sacraments.
[2] The Abbé Peyrard was vicar, *i.e.*, assistant curate.

the child's imagination, by the presentation of only the most attractive aspects of the priestly office, the confessor solemnly said to him: 'My child, God would have you one day become a priest,' little Charles could only stammer, in surprise and delight: 'I should like very much to be a priest, if my parents will consent.'

The consent of the parents, indeed! The mother's was already a certainty, demanded by her confessor in God's name. The father's also might be obtained by means of the child's own entreaties, supported by those of his wife, and for the sake of peace.

One April evening, a man in pensive mood might have been seen wending his way toward the presbytery, with a lively and happy little boy by his side. It was Charles and his father. The child could hardly contain himself at the thought that he should learn Latin, and meanwhile, as a first step towards ministering at the altar, should wear a choir-boy's bright and attractive dress.

Perhaps the father, by some mysterious intuition, had obtained a glimpse into the future, and saw to what a life of trouble the path led that he now was choosing for his son, for he was racked by anxious thoughts. It was only too true that he was taking this step in self-defence; every circumstance around him impelled him to this course. He did not at all like the idea of his son being made a priest—an idler, as it seemed to him—'and, besides,' he said to himself, 'there is no luck when a parson is on board. And who can tell that my son, after being priested, will not one day turn and reproach me for having given way?'

However, the poor man had not dared to return a direct refusal to the importunate entreaties of his wife. She, prompted by her confessor, kept constantly reiterating: 'Let the boy begin Latin; that does not bind us to anything further.'

To-day, tired of questioning and of resisting, and made miserable by the little one's tears, he rose from table saying: 'Enough of this! Come away, and let us go and see Monsieur le Curé.[1] You shall join the Latin class. If, later on, you are unhappy it will be no one's fault but your own.'

They reach the presbytery, are shown in, and find themselves in the great dining-room. On the mantelpiece stands a clock, in the form of a little plaster image of the Virgin. On the wall opposite hangs a lithograph of 'The Last Supper,' by Leonardo da Vinci. On either side of the window are two enormous frames, enclosing a large number of photographs. These frames filled with photographs are the pride of the Curé, and, indeed, of the whole parish. They contain, as in a precious casket, the portraits, each bearing the name, the date of ordination, and the present appointment, of each one of the many priests who are the children of Loirolles. Dominicans in white tunics, Capuchins in sombre drab, secular priests with shaven cheeks, bearded missionaries with great crosses on their breasts—every type of priest is represented there. Here you look upon the pale face and the merry one, the frowning brow and the smirking lip, the cunning smile and the tragic air, the attitude of the mystic and the rapt gaze of the enthusiast. The portraits had often been in Charles's thoughts, and now mentally filling up the vacant spaces, he said softly and confidently to his father: 'Look, father! I, too, shall be amongst these some day.'

At this moment the Curé came in, followed by his vicar, and they entered at once into conversation with the visitors. The north wind, which could be heard whistling behind a heavy hailstorm, brought an additional sense of comfort to

[1] The Curé is the Rector of the parish to whom is entrusted the cure of souls.

the warm interior, with its brightly burning fire. After a few common-place remarks, the boy's desire, and so the purpose of their visit, was made known.

'Well, now, my child,' said the Curé, 'I understand that you wish to become a priest?' This was said in a kind and fatherly way, and the old man was so venerable and impressive that Charles could do no more than mumble, almost inaudibly: 'Yes, Monsieur le Curé.'

The Abbé, the boy's confessor, whispered a few words of encouragement in his ear, in order to give him confidence.

'And why do you want to be a priest?' the old man continued.

The child, who had been dreamily gazing into the dancing flames, now replied without hesitation: 'Because Monsieur l'Abbé Peyrard says that I have a vocation.'

The Abbé nodded assent, and the old priest smiled upon the child. Then, turning to the father, he said: 'And you, sir, what do you think about it?'

The father, speaking up bravely, replied: 'You see, Monsieur le Curé, the little one asserts that it is his one desire, but he is very young to decide his own future. I should not have wished my son to become a priest, but I cannot bear to see him crying so about it; and it vexes me to hear his mother's constant sighs and moans. Let him begin Latin, and we shall see later what will be best for him.'

'You are right,' replied the Curé. 'The future is in God's hands. By all means let Charles enter the Clerical School; it does not bind him or you to anything beyond.'

'I think that will be wise,' answered the father; 'and I expect that time will prove to be on my side. Meanwhile I shall have made two people happy—the boy and his mother.'

The little boy, who was now crying for joy, was here pushed gently forward by his confessor. 'Kiss your father, child. He loves you dearly.'

'It is understood, then,' said the old Curé in conclusion, 'that Charles will begin at the Clerical School after the Easter holidays.' Then he stood up, and extending his hand rapturously towards the collection of photographs, he added: 'May God grant before I die that I may place in my collection the portrait of this child frocked as a priest.'

How unnatural and unreasonable! The child was not twelve years old, and this was to decide his life for him. And what does he know of life? What sort of choice was offered him? Did the confessor, who omitted no detail of the splendours of the priesthood, utter one word to him depicting the interest of the *business*, or the attractions of the *family* life? Did the confessor, who painted for the child, in glowing colours, the glory of the priest at the altar, let him have the least inkling of the struggles which would be sure to arise in that priest's soul? But clerical recruits have to be enlisted. What would happen if young children might no longer be enrolled? When they are quite tender they must be *forced* into the mould that is to shape them. Get ready the bandages! for they must have eyes and not see; they must have ears and not hear.

Yes, let us have the children! As in the negro slave-trade, the best slaves, and those most sought after, are the young ones! Ay indeed! Central Africa is not the only place where slave-traders are to be found. They exist under the sun of Europe, and ply their unholy traffic in the full light of day, and carry captive simple, trusting souls, with no other object than to secure the necessary contingent for the service of the Pope.

The Curé had not been quite straightforward when he

affirmed that to enter the Clerical School did not bind Charles to anything, for this school was, in point of fact, but the porch of the 'Little Seminary.' It was an annexe of the Church, placed between the parsonage and the vestry. Its professors were young priests, come back to teach where they themselves had been pupils; and what more need be said to describe the whole tone of the place?

When a Loirolles boy entered the Clerical School, the inhabitants of the town looked upon it as a declaration that he intended to become a priest. Thenceforth he was carefully shielded from all contact with companions of his own age, and placed in a class apart, in the imaginations of the bigots by whom he was surrounded. Watched, spied upon, even denounced for the slightest piece of mischief, or for the most harmless and childish nonsense, he was expected to be faultless, to be as 'perfect as an image.' In the eyes of the people of the town he was already a little short-cassocked Abbé.

On the other hand, for a Loirolles boy to leave the Clerical School, and not to follow on to the 'Little Seminary,' was looked upon as almost an apostasy. It was, so to speak, to be unfrocked, and consequently such a one was treated as a moral leper. At Loirolles only two things were possible—either to be honoured as a prophet or to be stoned.

Charles's father had been imprudent. In his simplicity he had not attached sufficient importance to these local considerations. The priests, however, were well aware of the popular feeling, for they had themselves implanted and nourished it. This was, in fact, one of the subtle methods employed by them to keep in the path that surely led to the priesthood the children that short-sighted fathers confided to their care.

The Curé, of course, knew this, and therefore was not

honest when he said: 'Let Charles enter the Clerical School; it will bind him to nothing further.'

Charles was radiant. His mother, in imagination, already saw him in the distant future, serving at the altar, and shedding a reflected glory on her old age. The father, too, believing that he had acted wisely, rejoiced silently in their happiness.

The child entered the school, after having spent the holidays in declining '*rosa*, a rose,' and in trying on his little cassock a score of times. His mother positively wept with joy when she saw him on the following Sunday, arrayed in the vestments of a choir-boy, in the midst of his thirty new school companions. And verily he looked a little angel. That night the mother could hardly be blamed for dreaming of cherubs.

Charles remained at the Clerical School for three years. Work began at half-past six in the morning, and did not end until seven in the evening. It was very hard in the depth of winter to rise early, and to go through the snowy streets. But the dear little fellow was stout of heart. Besides, his confessor's influence was resting upon him, giving him strength. He kept him up to the mark by occasionally saying: 'You are going to be a priest; work hard and bear small trials. He who would succeed must be willing to pursue the path that lead to success.' And Charles took heart, and went to school in all weathers, and worked steadily.

Then, how great was his joy when, at the end of the year, at the prize-giving, he was able to go up to his parents, crowned with a wreath of laurel, his arms full of prizes, and receive the tender kisses of his mother, and thus be repaid for all his efforts! But, alas! very soon he would have to leave that dearly-loved mother of his.

To have been a choir-boy could not have failed to leave

some abiding impressions on the mind of a child, for he does not serve in vain at the altar, nor draw so near to the holy ceremonies for nothing. A child does not observe how much of the priest's frequently repeated performance of the Church's rites is automatic. He sees a celebrant raise his eyes to the crucifix with every semblance of devotion, prostrate himself in complete abasement, humble himself in genuflections to the ground, and exhibit the greatest *external signs* of reverence and adoration.

It is the silver note of the acolyte's little bell that gives the signal for adoration to the faithful worshippers, when the priest holds up the Host in his hands between earth and heaven; and the signal also for humiliation when the priest is about to eat of the Sacred Body, and to drink of the Divine Blood from the chalice. It is the duty of the assistant to hand the water and the wine to the celebrant; he it is who pours the ablution upon the fingers that touch the Body of God; and all this he does with bowing genuflections, as if in the presence of a Superior Being.

From this atmosphere of mystery, and of close intercourse with the Divinity, there goes forth into the soul of an attentive, and by nature religiously minded, choir-boy, an inexplicable influence, mystical, but intense.

Little Charles had 'served Mass' daily for three years. His soul had become impregnated by a religiosity that was almost unhealthy. Every fibre of his passionate little heart vibrated with a daily strengthening longing to himself have communion with the 'Sacred Victim,' in the person of a sacrificing priest. So that when the time came for him to leave the Clerical School, after a facile mastery of its course of study, he was eager to be pronounced ready to pass on to the 'Little Seminary.'

But that involved the severing of a sacred tie. Up till now the boy had lived at home, and had not had to bear

the trial of being separated from his beloved and loving mother. However, his one desire now was to be a priest. Had not his confessor constantly said to him : 'My child, follow your sublime vocation. God is calling you through me. Keep your whole mind fixed on the glorious day of your ordination. Never look back. Do not forget the terrible warning in the Gospel : "Accursed of God is he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks backward without finishing the furrow." Be faithful unto the end to the heavenly call?'

Charles wished to be a priest, because he had been assured that for him it was the only way of salvation. His desire also was intensified, because it so happened that he was now confronted by an unexpected obstacle to his progress.

After the prize-giving, when the little boy had won his crown of laurel, the Curé took Charles's father in a friendly way by the arm, and led him off into the parsonage.

'You should be proud, sir, of your son's success,' he said. 'We are gratified. You are pleased, too, are you not?'

'Yes, indeed, Monsieur le Curé,' the man answered.

'Then, we are to send him to the "Little Seminary" of Montbaran, are we not?'

'Oh, Monsieur le Curé!——'

'How much prouder you will be,' the Curé continued, without heeding the interruption, 'when your son brings home laurel wreaths from that more conspicuous platform!'

'Undoubtedly; but——'

'Why, it will be the glory of our Clerical School. Besides, it will be done at our expense. The boy will not cost you anything. All you have to do is to consent.'

'That is all very well, Monsieur le Curé; but my ideas have not changed in the least in these three years, and I do not wish you to make a priest of my son.'

'Yet it is his vocation,' the Curé insisted. 'We affirm to you in the Name of God that it is so. You cannot thus injure your child by standing in his way!'

'Poor little chap!' gasped the father.

'Besides,' the Curé went on, 'the finishing his studies in the seminary, or in a lyceum, does not bind him to anything. And, again, if Charles enters the seminary at Montbaran, I take upon myself the entire responsibility of his board and education.'

'I thank you, Monsieur le Curé: that is another matter. We shall speak of this again, if I decide in favour of it, which, however, I do not think I shall.'

'On the contrary, I think that you will decide in favour of it, kind father, because it affects the entire happiness of the child you hold so dear.'

The Parthian shaft had sped. It was a happy idea to take the father on his weak side, and to speak to him of his boy's happiness.

But at home it had all to be gone through again. The father made a pretence at resistance; the child entreated and wept; the mother came artfully to his aid, by repeatedly bestowing on her husband persuasive caresses.

The Curé began to visit the family more and more often, and while with great skill he flattered the pride of the parents, he played adroitly on the parental affection, and made it vibrate to his clever touch; so the resolution of Charles's father soon began to totter.

The owner of the great factory in which the father had laboured for some forty years as an 'overlooker' was a personal friend of the family. One day he drew Charles's father into his office, and, without any preliminaries, said to him point-blank: 'You know your boy should go on with his studies and finish his course. Let him be entered at Montbaran, since everyone expects him to go. Perhaps

what you will not accept from Monsieur le Curé you may not refuse from your old friend. I will undertake the whole expense of the boy's education, in memory of the friendship that existed between your father and mine.' So Charles's father, pressed on all sides by the claims of love and friendship, gave in once again.

At Loirolles one method of obtaining recruits for the Church, and of removing the difficulty that besets children in poor circumstances who would adopt the vocation, was to make a forcible appeal to the temporal interests of the parents. For this the Curé had sufficient resources at command. Many wealthy and important families gloried in providing the funds necessary for the making of a priest; and the priests traded upon the religious ambition of these devotees, without awakening any suspicion in their minds as to the kind of slavery into which these youthful recruits were being plunged. The clergy therefore had inexhaustible means and methods for the enrolment of clerics.

To return to Charles. The child spent the holidays in varying moods of thoughtless happiness and of deep sadness. His heart was divided between the prospects of pursuing his 'vocation' and the coming separation from his home. He was joyful at the thought of taking a step forward, by entering the 'Little Seminary,' and miserable at that of going away from home, far out into the unknown world. When he felt his mother's loving arms around him, the kisses he gave her had been mingled more than once with tears. Then would follow a sudden access of mystic fervour, when he would run and fling himself down before a statue of the Virgin, in the mysterious dimness of a deserted chapel, and once more consecrate himself body and soul to God, repeating the calming and quieting prayers of childhood.

Every day he saw the Abbé Peyrard at the parsonage, and the priest never failed to play upon the boy's imagina-

tion, hypnotizing him, so to speak, by setting before him the joys of the priesthood, as in a mirage.

Then, again, Charles would often take a seat on a little stool at his mother's feet, and watch with much interest the making of his school outfit. The number 4, which had to be sewn on each article, seemed to him to be a mark of fate.

So the last days of the holidays took wing, and one morning the seven boys, the destined scholars of the 'Little Seminary,' were ready to assist at the celebration of the farewell Mass, in the Chapel of the Virgin. There were solemn notes in this service well designed to impress these youthful minds. After the reading of the Gospel, each with a lighted taper in the left hand, and with the right hand laid upon the Missal, was made to swear ever to remain faithful to his 'vocation.' Then, after the ceremony was over, they were grouped before the 'pictures of the former pupils,' and were thus addressed by the Curé:

'Now, my children, you are about to leave Loirolles. To-morrow you will be in the "Little Seminary." Let none of you exhibit any sign of weakness. Be strong and keep up your courage. "Whoso loveth father or mother more than the Saviour is not worthy of Him." You are going to prepare yourselves, and to grow ever more and more worthy to serve the Church. Whithersoever you may be called, to parishes, to missions, or to religious Orders, you will go unhesitatingly, as your predecessors of the Clerical School have done before you. Never forget that the Church is our very Holy Mother, nor that we owe her love and obedience even unto death. Always look above and beyond your home. Whoso forsaketh father or mother for God shall receive an hundredfold. . . .'

The children's emotions were deeply stirred, and, struggling hard to keep back their tears, they were made to

kneel down; then, lifting up his hands like a patriarch, the Curé pronounced over them his blessing, and tenderly kissed each one.

What a sad evening was the last one spent at home, where all hearts were bursting with sorrow! Charles's sister whispered to him, sobbing bitterly, 'Look at your trunk; it seems as if it might be your coffin.' No one slept much that night, because each one felt as if a sword was piercing his soul.

The next day a Professor is in waiting at the railway-station to accompany the seven new scholars to the 'Little Seminary.' Oh, the anguish of the last kisses! The train moves off. It seems to Charles as if the carriages are thumping upon his heart. The father, whose throat was so contracted with grief that he could utter no sound, gives a wave of the hand in farewell. The mother, whose eyes are now streaming with the tears she can no longer restrain, gazes with loving intensity after the fast-vanishing figure of her boy.

'Well, that is over. The 'vocation' separates mother from son for ever, for it is the calculated aim of the priestly vocation to break the ties of home-life. In the education given to the scholars, everything tends to represent the natural affections as too human, too low. By the stratagems of a delicate artfulness, under the cloak of religion, these young souls are constrained to soar above all natural things. Little by little the sacred affections of family life are replaced by artificial attachments. 'Separate yourselves from your own people! Your true family and home is the Church.' The mother has lost her son. He can never-more be her very own again.

CHAPTER II

AT THE 'LITTLE SEMINARY'

THE distractions of the journey, and of the arrival at Montbaran, somewhat mitigated Charles' sadness at the separation from his parents. The Superior received him in a formal manner, dismissing him, however, with a kindly word; but his new Professor, who had himself been a scholar of the Clerical School, gave the child a friendly welcome.

In the linen-room the boy found a nun, a woman from his own town of Loirolles, who from the first took a motherly interest in him. From that moment Charles felt less of a stranger in a strange place. He found his own name on the wardrobe in which he was to put away his clothes; he read it also on one of the little beds in the St. Joseph dormitory, and again on the desk which was allotted to his use in the class-room. Running round through courtyards and corridors, he endeavoured to settle himself in, showing a feverish activity that distracted his mind. But at night, when in the silence of the dormitory he found himself alone with his heart, the thought of home completely overmastered him, and he cried and sobbed, until from sheer exhaustion he fell asleep—only to dream of the loved ones from whom he had parted in the morning.

The next day the pupils were given an essay to write, the result of which was to determine their places in the school. Charles, who was now fourteen and a half years old, was placed in the third form.

In the evening they went for a walk, and on their return the *Veni Creator* ('Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire') was sung, as the preliminary to a service of 'Retreat.'

In the 'Little Seminary' the subject of the lecture given at these 'Retreats' is almost always the same. We should be loosened from the world, and, it is also insinuated, from our homes likewise. We should flee from sin for fear of hell-fire. None of our feelings should ever be concealed from our confessor, whether they are likes or dislikes. We should reverence the priest as we would a saint in heaven. And, above all, we should never lose sight of the fact that we are destined for the service of the Church.

Charles honestly tried to order his life by these rules and principles. He forced himself to repress his too great love of home, and set himself to will, with all his might, to live only for God and for the Church.

He had, however, frequent backslidings, for his loving disposition could not readily accustom itself to the chill of such isolation. At times he longed for his mother, and wrote letters home overflowing with the most loving affection. Then a reaction would set in, as violent as it was unnatural, and, once more regaining command over himself, he would run and throw himself at his confessor's feet, accusing himself, as of a crime, for these feelings of human affection, which, as had been shown him, were so little compatible with his 'vocation.'

On the day after the 'Retreat,' the result of the essay-writing competition was proclaimed from a raised table in the refectory, the same table at which the masters took their meals.

Charles felt dreadfully nervous, because the Professor had said that, considering the report from the Clerical School, they expected a good deal of him. The remembrance of certain words that his father had said to him in the days of resistance tended to increase his nervousness. They were these: 'If you are not among the first three of your class, you shall come straight home again!'

At length the tension was relieved. The order in the third class is being announced. 'In tertia: primus, Dominus X; secundus, Dominus Y; tertius, Dominus Fleury. . . .';[1] Charles started in his seat; he heard no more of the list down to thirty-third. His father would be satisfied.

At the second competition, in essay-writing and composition, he was second in Latin translation. At the third examination he was first in Latin verse. On this occasion he was obliged to rise from his place, according to the custom of the school, and, pale with nervous excitement, leave his seat and march, amid general silence, up to the desk of the Superior, in order to have a little green ribbon pinned on his breast. Oh that little bit of ribbon! Charles had a right to wear it for a whole week amongst his schoolfellows, but that very evening he sent it to Loirolles, enclosed in a letter full of his love and of his delight in his success.

Charles was an apt pupil; simple-minded and frank, he sincerely believed that everything was being done for the best in this, the best of all the 'Little Seminaries.' Nevertheless, there were some things that made a somewhat painful impression upon him.

Amongst his new companions there was a boy of his own age, very like himself in temperament, and about as free from guile. He was a boy who looked at and judged things

[1] In the third class: 1st, Mr. X; 2nd, Mr. Y; 3rd, Mr. Fleury.

from much the same standpoint as Charles. Between these two kindred spirits a warm friendship soon sprang up. They would give each other a warm and rapid hand-clasp every day when they were saying 'good-morning' or 'good-night.' In play-hours they always took part in the same games. In school Charles would often help Albert with his lessons. And, the greatest pleasure of all, they would read together on Sundays the letters which they each had received from home.

No more than this was needed to draw down summary vengeance on the heads of these two juveniles. In the name of I know not what great virtue, or, rather, of I know not what 'mean suspicion,' they were one day summoned to appear before the Superior. He fixed them with a stony stare, and then, launching upon them a deluge of anathemas, told them that the close friendship which they were indulging was leading them directly down to the abyss; that it was the snare of the Devil; and that, if they persisted, they would be expelled from the 'Little Seminary' without mercy.

Judge of their consternation. What the Superior had said must, of course, be Gospel truth: therefore nothing else was possible but submission. Charles, with a sad heart, made a show of giving up playing with Albert, but he could not at all understand how such a friendship could possibly be a sin.

In the case of boys less pure in mind than these, would there not have been a danger of thus awakening thoughts of evil, or, at least, of exposing them to the danger of hypocrisy? How blind are those who thus condemn one of the most legitimate sentiments of the human heart, and one of the chiefest sources of human pleasure!

Not every scholar entered at Montbaran was destined for the 'Great Seminary.' The 'Pekins,' as they were disdain-

fully called, or the 'Outsiders,' were, as a general rule, the hardest workers. They were possessed of as strong a sense of their own individuality as was needful to enable them to take their proper place in any 'civil' walk in life which they might elect to follow.

Here let us note in passing that the seminary instructors all tried to eliminate from the minds of their scholars this feeling of personal individuality. They went so far as to condemn it, in the name of Christian 'humility,' as a criminal form of pride. This is logical enough from their standpoint. They have no desire to create independent and living personalities. Their whole aim is to force these separate entities to become subservient working parts in that gigantic mechanism, that great 'engine of war,' the Roman Church.

Notwithstanding that the 'Pekins' or 'Outsiders' of Montbaran were among the best scholars, Charles observed, with some astonishment, that they were distinctly looked down upon by everyone. The Professors seemed to consider them little better than heathens and heretics.

'Have as little as possible to do with them,' they would say, 'lest you should endanger your "vocation." They are worldly-minded, and those who are to become Levites must cultivate an exclusive Church spirit, and guard it as their sacred treasure.'

This prohibition was artfully insinuated, rather than openly and formally placarded; and those pupils who made a parade of their piety took good care to follow the example set by the masters. Whether by the pupils who were sincere, or by those who were artful, everything was done with a view to obtaining the approval of the instructors. These self-righteous little saints were ill-natured enough to send their less-approved school-fellows to Coventry.

However, the despised ones endured this covert persecu-

tion quite cheerfully, and they profited by it, in that it gave them opportunities for forming their own private groups, and for discussing together the plans for their several futures.

Charles, when scolded for joining in their conversations and games, would answer ingenuously: 'What a great pity it is that friendship and piety cannot be combined!'

In every 'Little Seminary' there exists, as it were, a State within the State: I refer to the 'Society of the Blessed Virgin.' The soul of the Society is the 'School Director.' He is a priest, and second only in authority to the Superior. His duty it is to direct, and watch over, the spiritual condition, the spiritual welfare, of the scholars. There is also a Board appointed by this Director, of which the President, Vice-President, and Secretary, are drawn from among the rhetoricians.[1] This Board, under the immediate control of the Director, elects its new members, but only after they have served for one year as 'probationers.' The chief thing required of a candidate for election is a deep and reverent worship of the Virgin. The election-day is made a great day. The altar is dressed with its most beautiful ornaments; it is profusely decorated with flowers, and with many lighted candles. After the chants and prayers, the Director delivers a moving address, usually taking for his text: 'Devotus Mariæ nunquam perebit' (The servant of Mary shall never perish). Imaginations are fired, and enthusiasm is at its height. Then all the new members of the Society recite aloud this consecration formula: 'O Mary, our Sovereign Lady and our Mother, we swear this day to live in thy service, and to die in thy love. Gate of Heaven! open for us the celestial abode, where we may come and dwell with thee!'

Then they have to sign their names in the register book

[1] Those learning rhetoric. A study unduly neglected in England.

of the Society, and each receives a large Wonder-Working Medal on a ribbon, much in the style of a decoration, which he has to wear every Sunday and whenever he receives the 'Holy Communion.'

The true 'Child of Mary' goes to Confession, and to the Holy Table, every week, as an obligation of religion. From the day on which he is admitted to the Society the new member enjoys extra privileges. The masters trust him more. Of the scholars, some endow him with a certain prestige, and others, more clear-sighted, begin to mistrust him, because—and this aroused in Charles the strongest feelings of indignation—it was amongst these 'Children of Mary' that the Professors found helpers, who became their tools by acting as spies.

Under the pretext of improving the religious tone of the scholars, under the cloak of zeal for Christianity, and in the name of 'brotherly love,' the masters set some of these 'Children of Mary' to notice and to report any wrong-doing that they might observe in the community. And these poor litle dupes, thinking to advance the cause of truth, sometimes have serious scruples as to whether they should ever omit to report any merely mischievous frolic which they may have witnessed, or any word of biting malice which they may have heard, or any peccadillo which they may have seen committed. What they do, in fact, report are usually some merely trifling infractions of the rules. Nevertheless, in the name of true religion, they are made to sink to the vile level of the spy, and are forced to follow the despicable trade of the informer. Some, with more upright instincts, naturally so revolt from this kind of espionage that the masters have to exercise a certain amount of diplomacy. When they see that there is a lack of spontaneity about an accusation, they artfully try to draw it out by offering the bait of an earthly or of a heavenly

reward; or else by playing upon feelings of emulation, or by awakening jealousy.

One day Charles let fall an imprudent remark which, quite without intention on his part, led to another pupil being punished. This so distressed him that ever afterwards he kept strict watch over his speech, and was most guarded in his replies.

That kind of complicity with the informers led to a very close familiarity between the masters and certain of the boys. The spies were the masters' 'pets,' and this favouritism even found its way into lesson-hours. These 'favourites' might do anything with impunity. Lessons unprepared, duties ill-performed, talking when there should have been silence, were faults which were ruthlessly visited upon non-members of the Society of Mary, but were passed over in the case of the 'pet,' without punishment, and without even a frown. Naturally, such a boy was despised, and even detested, by his school-fellows. Another consequence of this favouritism was the starting of jealousies amongst the 'pets' themselves, and these gave rise to many a scurvy trick. One wet and rainy day, when the usual afternoon walk had been pronounced impossible, two of the Director's indulged children, spending the afternoon in his room, where there was a good fire, rummaged everywhere, searching cupboard and drawer, without either ceremony or discretion, and finally discovered a razor. Thereupon one of the boys was possessed by a silly idea, which he at once proceeded to put into execution. By diligent use of the razor and a pair of compasses, he shaved upon the other boy's head a large tonsure. The two rogues were no more than twelve years of age. The rage of the Director may be imagined, when he came in and found himself face to face with this masterpiece. Imagine the Homeric laughter which ran round the refectory at the next meal, as soon as

the boys had caught sight of the cranium that had been so shamefully handled. It is said that the story did not stay within the four walls of the seminary, but went the round of all the drawing-rooms and cafés in Montbaran. The tonsured one happened to be the son of an important personage in the town.

That the 'pets' were a sort of secret police may be seen from the following exploit. At the beginning of term a new Superior assumed the functions of a Custom House officer. Not content with searching the boys' boxes, he went so far as to turn out their pockets. On one he found cakes, on another cigarettes, on a third a sausage, on a fourth a flask of chartreuse ; and he confiscated everything. In this sweep Charles lost a flask of peppermint essence (*alcohol de menthe*) that his mother had given him for his refreshment on the spring walking excursions ; and this kind of 'paying-up,' coming as a fresh vexation, so excited his imagination that he made it the subject of a serio-comic poem, to which a school-fellow added several funny sketches. This effusion quickly made the round of all the class-rooms, and became a great source of amusement. However, the storm came blowing up. One of the 'pets' informed against the two culprits, and they were summoned before the Superior. Here they found the temperature was considerably below zero. Charles was commanded to eat his dinner kneeling—that is, with his plate in his lap—in the very centre of the refectory. And his companion in wickedness, who, unfortunately for himself, was stronger as a draughtsman than as a rhymster, was sent down a form.

But the one regulation which galled Charles most of all was that which required all letters written by the scholars to be handed over, open, for the Superior to read. It was by no means an uncommon thing for a boy to be sent for by the Superior to correct or to rewrite his letter, if a

complaint happened to be found in it concerning the quality of the food, or the injustice of a Professor, or the harshness of an usher. Indeed, to find out such allusions was the principal object of the regulation.

It is absolutely revolting that any man, 'Superior' though he be, should thus thrust himself in between parent and child, in the matter of their private correspondence. The personal relations between those who are so near of kin should be treated as free and as sacred. No one has a right to pry into it, either by the exercise of superior authority or by guile. A school is an institution of such a kind that to do this sort of thing there is to violate a temple of refuge, and to encourage the practice of falsehood, or at least the love of subterfuge.

Charles had a good deal to bear on account of what one might call the modesty of his affection. Under these trying circumstances he did not dare to give anything like free play to his feelings, nor to use in his letters those caressing words of love which gave so much pleasure to his mother, nor to make any signs of tenderness or affection. He shrank from the sarcastic sneers of the Superior, more even than he feared the scoldings of his confessor.

However, when his parents came to visit him he made up for it, and let himself go. Revelling in an entire day of liberty, he stayed out with them in the town, giving free flow to the ardent love of his heart, and relieving himself of the weight that oppressed him when in the seminary.

But happier than all else were the holidays—days of relaxation that were not very liberally dispensed, seeing that only one week was given at Easter and two months in summer. But what joy it was to be home again! And yet he seemed to get an impression that *something* had changed—that something which used to be there had come to an end. It was not quite the home that it had been

As years went by, Charles gradually felt himself becoming less and less one of the family. The seminary was taking possession of him, and, however it had come about, the fact remained that nothing was quite as it had been, for the thought was never altogether absent from his mind that his duty would very shortly cause another separation, and call him off again. 'Forsake thy father and thy mother; the Church is thy true home.'

Besides, even during the holidays the priests tried, in a way, to keep him separate from his own people. There is a tradition at Loirolles that the pupils of the 'Little Seminary' are to spend the greater part of their holidays at the parsonage. They are supposed to go there to do their holiday tasks. A gymnasium for games is provided for them, a reading-room, and a large garden, where they may hold their wrestling matches and their sports. They were 'obliged' also to be present at the Curé's daily Mass, to hear daily a 'spiritual address,' to go every Saturday to Confession, and to receive every Sunday the Holy Communion at his hands. To associate with young men of their own age in the town was expressly forbidden. What was specially advised in the 'Retreat' address, which always precedes the breaking up of the school term, was that in the holidays they should go out for walks together, and let no outsiders join in their amusements. And this was the plan that found favour with the Loirolles clergy. Thus do they begin to reach the end they have in view, namely, that of constraining the priest always to live on the fringe, on the borders, of society. And the method by which they seek to attain this end is gently to accustom the pupils of the 'Little Seminary' to flee from the world, and even from all family relationships, as men would who seek safety in time of danger.

The Professors of the Seminary of Montbaran are princi-

pally priests of the diocese. The year that Charles went into the elocution class he had, however, a Jesuit Father as his teacher. This holy Father thought of nothing but his class work (and how many Jesuits would have done so?), and in that he proved himself most masterly. This was, in consequence, the best year of the course for Charles. His Professor took pains to stimulate his keenness for work, and many times a week took the lad into his own room, and spent part of the night in further coaching him.

It was in that room that Charles first caught sight of one of those instruments for mortifying the flesh, of which he had often heard. It was an iron belt, whose sharp points were actually rusting with blood-stains. The holy Father had left it out inadvertently, and seemed vexed that Charles had seen it, and strongly forbade him to breathe a word about it to anyone.

Charles worked desperately hard, and each year he was amongst those who were the most often called up to receive prizes. What joy it gave him to carry off his many laurel wreaths to Loirolles, and to amuse himself afterwards by arranging them in a fragile pile on the head of his little sister! How proud, too, it made him to know that the Curé spoke of him to the pupils of the Clerical School as the glory of the school!

It is true that his confessor, Abbé Peyrard, threw cold water on this simple joy, and called it vanity and pride. 'Why should you be proud of it all?' he would say to him. 'It is God to whom you owe your success. You are taking from Him the glory while listening to the voice of vanity!'

Charles' priestly confessor at Montbaran no longer gave himself serious trouble on his account. Now and then he would say: 'Do not forget that the Abbé Peyrard was the man who clearly discerned your vocation.' This was

merely the turn of a watch-key, and the cerebral mechanism had been so well put in order by the Abbé that Charles went straight forward, without stopping for a moment to reflect, quite convinced that he had the 'vocation.' At that time the faintest idea that the Abbé might have been deceived in him had not yet dawned upon him.

Herein lies the beginning of the mischief done to simple young lads. The priest usurps the place of Almighty God in a child's conscience, and so, later on, the young man acquires the habit of not thinking for himself, and of not judging for himself, because ever since he has been able to reason, he has been trained to believe that to will and to think as the confessor wills and thinks is to will and to think according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is told to purge himself of all natural affection ; and Charles conscientiously proceeded to strip his poor heart of every shoot and blossom of filial love, heedless of the anguish involved. He was trained to look upon the feelings of affection that occasionally overmastered him as serious faults, and as such the lad conscientiously repented of them before the Being who was represented to him as merely a jealous God. Little by little his conscience was thus benumbed ; mechanical duties glided into the place of true duties, and personal initiative began to languish in his soul. A brilliant scholar notwithstanding, Charles became more and more soulless. The critical function of his mind was undeveloped from want of use, and his moral energy lay dormant. In short, he gradually became, without suspecting it and without protest, a smoothly working automaton—a true pupil of the 'Little Seminary,' ripening for the 'Great Seminary.'

CHAPTER III

AT THE 'GREAT SEMINARY' OF PHILOSOPHY

DURING the holidays of the Rhetoric School came the culminating assault upon the resistance of our hero's father. Charles had now grown into a fine young fellow, and his successes at Montbaran had given him a position of superiority even in the eyes of his father. The thought of one day seeing his son a priest had by slow degrees made its way into the father's mind, as dropping water, which ends by splitting up a rock. The good and attractive sides of the sacerdotal life worked on him, with a subtle seductiveness, little by little; and he would sometimes catch himself smiling at the prospect of quietly planting his own cabbages, during the latter years of his life, in the garden of his son's presbytery. This dream, so common to townsfolk, of ending their days in a quiet nook in the country, was, by force of circumstances alone, to become in his case a reality.

And, moreover, how could he possibly resist this great fellow, who for the past six years had been fondly cherishing the thought of one day becoming a priest? What else could he do on hearing him declare seriously, with all the self-assurance of youth, 'Either I must be a priest, or I shall become a revolutionist.' All this bore clear witness to a resolute will and to a desire which had become so

definite as to have taken, if one may so describe it, a bodily shape. To hinder him, therefore, from pursuing the career to which everything seemed to point would be but to hasten a painful crisis. So the father gave in, and towards the end of the holidays Charles and the Abbé Peyrard paid a visit to the porter of the 'Great Seminary' to order a cassock.

The Abbé was proud of his handiwork. The little boy whom he had picked out from among the children of the catechetical class when he was no more than six or seven years old was now about to become an Abbé. He would never again see him in church in choir-boy costume. He would meet him, in street and square, clothed in ecclesiastical vesture, which he would have to wear for the rest of his life. And what a pleasure it would be, to be able to say to the devout people of Loirolles, 'You see this young Abbé Fleury? It was I who first discovered that he had a "vocation."' He already saw himself in imagination solemnly assisting this newly-fledged priest at the altar on the day when Charles, fresh from his ordination, should say his first Mass in his native parish.

So Charles entered the 'Great Seminary of Philosophy' at Aliesse. On the very evening of his arrival he quitted his 'worldly habit,' and, putting on his new cassock, made his way to the chapel to hear an address for the occasion. Just as at Montbaran, where the service for admitting members to the 'Society of Mary' was a solemn one, so here the ceremony of the 'taking of the holy habit' was conducted with great solemnity. The brilliantly lighted altar, touching prayers, moving canticles—everything was adapted to efface the thought of earthly things. Then, when the last rolling tones of the organ-pipes had died away, the Superior ascended the pulpit, and made an ingenious adaptation of the text, 'They parted My garments

among them, and cast lots upon My vesture,' which seemed to Charles as impressive as it certainly was strange. The sermon was throughout a *tour de force* carrying the youthful Levites to the foot of Calvary, to take from beneath the cross the vesture of the Lord and Saviour. Jesus died, and in this new vesture they, too, must die to the world. They were to become soldiers of the Church, but in donning the uniform of this glorious army they must first be impregnated with its spirit of discipline.

The sermon ended, they intoned the *Ave, Maris Stella* (Hail, Star of the Sea),[1] and two by two they marched up towards the altar—on the steps of which the Professors were ranged in semicircle—to receive from the hands of the Superior, and to vest themselves in, the wide-sleeved white surplice. Next the *Magnificat* was chanted, and Charles, supremely happy, already conscious of a new self-development, mingled his voice with those of his fellow-students. But we may well pity this unfortunate youth. It would be true to say, not that he had assumed the cassock, but that the cassock had usurped him, and had become on him a badge of mental and moral bondage—a bondage from which he was one day to regain his freedom, but only by a superhuman effort.

A long 'Retreat' followed. For a whole week a protracted series of religious exercises succeeded one another, without leaving any intervals for study. There were long-drawn-out meditations and wearisome preachings of sermons, readings on spiritual subjects, chantings of the Office of the Virgin, and prayers interminable. Even in time of recreation, as at meals, silence had to be maintained. Now and then there might be a break in the monotony. A reader might make a slip of the tongue, or a novice might trip on the skirt of his cassock and stumble on the stairs, and then a flash

[1] A Roman Catholic hymn addressed to the Virgin Mary.

of merriment would for a moment smooth out the young brows. But on the whole it was a time of profound contemplation, sombre as a cemetery, where shadows cross and recross in the gloom of evening. Confession is the central point of the Retreat; and it is a rule that the first Confession must be a *general* one. So, trying to pass his former life in review from as far back as he could remember, Charles strove hard to forget none of the faults that he had been guilty of through all these years. Examining everything with the greatest conscientiousness and as with a magnifying-glass, he drew up a list of misdeeds that stupefied him. Mere childish frolics and youthful peccadilloes, which might reasonably have been buried in forgetfulness, under the influence of the unnatural atmosphere of the Retreat assumed the form of veritable crimes. Covered with shame and confusion, Charles picked up his schedule and took it to the 'Director' whom he had chosen.

The Director, however, laid no stress on those insignificant declarations, which he no doubt appraised at their true value. Nevertheless, in his earlier interviews with the lad he tried to impress upon him the conviction that he could do nothing by himself; that the Director was God's representative, and that he ought to refer all his thoughts and desires to him.

The following is the first page that was written by the young Abbé on this subject in his 'Notes on the Impressions made by the Retreat':

'*October* 17, 188–.

'By reason of original sin all my faculties have been enfeebled; my will-power has received a deadly blow. I am prompted to evil by an irresistible propensity. My mind says "No"; my will says "Yes." I am feeble—very feeble.

'Oh, my God, give me a practical conviction of my weak-

ness! May this remain not merely as a mental conviction, but may it influence every act of my life! It is to Thee, through my Director, that I shall come when I need support for my feeble will, encouragement against despondency, help in struggles! Thy law, through the lips of my Director, shall be my guide; Thy will, my rule of conduct; Thy inspirations, the lamp to my feet! I am Thine, wholly Thine, and no longer mine own!

'I must have no longer any will of my own. I must lay aside the pride of choice, and obey unquestioningly. I must avoid being led into error by the madness of submitting all things to reason. When Thou, O Lord, shalt have spoken through the mouth of my Director, the matter will be at an end as far as I am concerned; the question will then have been decided beyond dispute.

'I have pride both of mind and of will, and yet how much I feel that feebleness of my mind and that unreliability of my own will! How, then, can I place any confidence in myself? Like a reed, shaken by the winds of my passions, spent and feeble, I need a support, and yet I would fain stand alone.

'But taking as my guide the law of God, as my Director shall indicate, I shall not fail to escape from the darkness of my blinded mind, and from the deceptions of my own wicked will.

'O God, whom I claim as my portion and inheritance, purge me from this wretched self-conceit; it vitiates my good actions notwithstanding all I can do; its hateful influence corrupts my good impulses. Until the last rag of my old "self" shall have been stripped away, no progress in holiness is possible.

'I renounce myself. . . . Hic est cibus meus, ut faciam voluntatem Patris mei qui in cœlis est.'[1]

[1] 'My meat is to do the will of my Father which is in heaven.'

Thus, without any mental reservation whatever, Charles delivered himself up into the hands of another man, and that man his Director. This priest was a clever observer, who made the study of conscience the sole business of his life. Monsieur Buret, who in other respects was really a good and holy man, very affable, and ready to do anyone a good turn, began methodically to work on his new pupil. And the first thing he tried to accomplish was to produce a void in the soul, which he sought to fashion to his idea, by crushing down all the natural affections, all tendency to free inquiry, and all independence of thought and action.

He pointed out to Charles that natural affection is a form of earthly selfishness that is opposed to the love of God; that love of any sort was self-seeking, and keeping back from God the highest worship that is due to Him; that to love anyone but Him was to take root downwards, whereas one ought, on the contrary, to uproot one's self, so as to be absolutely free to serve God; that to cherish earthly love was to cleave to the creature instead of to the Creator: in a word, that sensual love was often a sin, and always a mistake. One only love should flourish and expand in the heart of a collegian, and that the love of God in His Church.

'Freedom of inquiry,' according to Monsieur Buret, was a moral monster, and hydra-headed. It must be struck down at all costs. 'Philosophy,' he would say, 'teaches you to argue and debate; but everything has already been investigated by men far more learned than you are. All you have to do is to accept the conclusions of "our authorities" with your eyes shut, and try to assimilate the deductions of their wisdom. If you should attempt to think for yourself, the demon of Pride will lead you to the abyss. The exercise of human reason is rebellion and sin. As for "independence of will," what error can be greater

than that of trying to be your own counsellor? My dear boy, do take care not to come to any kind of conclusion without first bringing the matter before your Director. Never forget that none can be judge of his own cause. Those who are led by their own feelings run to destruction. Self-will is the worst form of blindness, and is the mother of sin.'

As soon as Monsieur Buret thought that Charles was fairly convinced that his mind, his energies, and his heart, were full of deadly germs, he brought his work of negation and his efforts at demolition to an end, and began to reconstruct on new foundations. He taught positive truths and duties, and endeavoured to sow living seed in his mind by commending such maxims as these:

'Obedience is the soul of the priestly life.'

'According to the rule of St. Ignatius, the mind must be bent and trained to obey unreservedly, and to judge accordingly. "If what seems to you to be black is declared by authority to be white, you must pronounce it to be white."'

'The will must restrain its freedom of choice, and must obey without demur, according to the rule of St. Benedict where he laid down that, "if a Superior gives a command that seems to you to be absurd and impossible, you must nevertheless try to perform it."'

'To obey one's Director is to rule: *Cui servire, regnare est.* Obedience makes us conquerors: *Vir obediens loquetur victorias.*'

Monsieur Buret thus demanded of Charles the entire submission of his will, the absolute renunciation of all freedom of choice, and of all personal exercise of that divine gift of reason, which are God's most glorious gifts and trusts to mankind.

All Directors of the Great Seminaries train their spiritual

sons in this way, and, unhappily, this system, whether it be applied in a hard and cruel manner, or in a subtle and underhand one, cannot fail in some measure to demoralize those who are subjected to its influence.

'Everything combines to stuff the minds of the youthful Levites with illusions concerning the future. There is an unrelaxed effort constantly in operation to impregnate them with mysticism, and to transport them out of the realites of the world into the realm of the unknown. A subtle form of interpretation, which obscures the plainest and clearest texts of Scripture, perverts their understanding, and accustoms them to that tortuous casuistry of Ignatius Loyola which everywhere meets with such severe censure. In this manner they entice the entire shoal of students into their draw-net. Then, when all exercise of freewill on their part is finally suppressed, when their consciences are enslaved, and inseparably, and of necessity, mated with fear, they are delivered over into the power of the priest, who alone may take any initiative. Little of the man remains, but a priest has been fashioned.'[1]

This fashioning, or, rather, crippling of souls, gives a power to the Director of a seminary which is as unique as it is far-reaching. All confessors practise upon individual consciences, but they do so in various ways. The ordinary parish clergy do not usually become Directors in seminaries. As the monks insinuate, and as the devout among the laity readily repeat, these rarely possess the 'inward and spiritual grace.' They are simply dispensers of absolution. But the Regular[2] priest, the 'Confessor-Director,' wins his triumph by the exercise of mysticism and causuistry. He has a warrant for the new forms of devotion that he introduces, which are to prove infallible as panaceas for all human

[1] F. Chavard: 'Le Célibat, le Prêtre, et la Femme,' p. 225.
[2] Regular = under monkish regulations of life.

frailties. He dissects questions of conscience, and is most ingenious in the exhaustiveness of his analysis, for to be a guide to the overscrupulous is his very life. The Director of a seminary is a real master of his art, inasmuch as he may verily be said to 'create' those whom he calls his followers, or describes as his spiritual children. Whence is that authority derived—shall I call it moral or immoral?—which imposes on the priest so heavy and life-long a burden, but which, astonishing as it may appear, blesses his life like a grace from God, and without which he could not live? Unless liberated by a miracle, a priest is throughout his whole life dominated by the Director of his seminary.

With a mind full of reverence and obedience, Charles acquiesced without a pang in this captivity of his whole moral being, and he even enjoyed the feeling of security that it seemed to give him. His confessor had taken a delight in exaggerating the terribleness of the hell that he feared, so that it became an inexpressible relief to be able to leave everything to the guidance of one who in God's sight was alone responsible. For the lad was continually being told that he who obeyed his Director in all things could never enter into condemnation, even although the latter might occasionally make mistakes. Moreover, in a matter of this sort the natural indolence of the human soul has to be taken into account. What, apparently, can be more comfortable than to be saved from the trouble and worry of weighing the pros and cons when a decision is required? What more restful than to be delivered from the agony of hesitation, or to be rescued from all fear of self-deception? Life for Charles need have no further perplexities. With his hand in that of his Director, he could walk with his eyes shut, in full confidence that the way of salvation would for him always be smooth, and clear from all obstruction.

A day was to come, however, when the Abbé Fleury should be conscious that this state of tutelage was in reality nothing but a gilded yoke of slavery; when he should realize to what a state of decay his soul had, in God's name, been reduced; a day when he should search the Gospels to find a justification for the abdication of his own individuality, and should find none. What would then be his grief, on the discovery that he had been the too-confiding victim of an odious system, under which his whole nature had been perverted and distorted, in order to make of him a blind, mechanical tool? But how great, on the other hand, would then be his joy to lay hold of the 'liberty with which Christ has made us free,' and ever after to live in that liberty!

From the very first the Superior gave regular lectures on 'Deportment.' He spoke of the ordinary layman's gait, with its freedom of movement, easy and graceful; of the military pace, with its haughty stiffness; of the ecclesiastical bearing, with its decorous gravity. All the new philosophy students, just arrived from the 'Little Seminary,' were naturally infected with the civilian manner. The cassock, while it impeded their freedom of movement, did not prevent them from occasionally running along the corridors, or from giving vent to the exuberance of their spirits in the sports of the recreation-hour. That was a grave defect, however, which must be corrected without delay. The follower of St. Sulpician, they say, should have three characteristics, and these have been humorously summed up in the following distich:

'*Ignis amor, gravis incessus, vox nescia cantu;*
Hæc tria si fuerint, Sulpicianus eris.'

'Practise Pussy's virtues three
If you'd a Sulpician be:
Sprawl on hearth,
Crawl on path,
Squall in feline harmony.'

A more dignified translation, however, might be given: 'The disciple of St. Sulpician, it would seem, loves to roast himself before a good fire; when he walks abroad he moves with dignity, and usually sings atrociously.'

It is evident that a Superior, with the best will in the world, cannot implant a love for the snug chimney-corner in those who prefer a bracing air to the temperature of a stove-house, any more than he can prevent those who have been endowed with an ear for music from singing in tune; but he laid the greatest possible stress upon the third point —gravity of carriage and of demeanour. On this point he never could say enough. The collegian must hasten without hurry. There must be no extravagant gestures, no headlong dash, no mundane bursts of language. He must take care lest his cassock should blow about and reveal those under garments which, imposed by necessity, must be viewed as part of the evil heritage of all humanity, and be taken as a reminder of the consequences of sin.[1]

Everything must be carefully adjusted and borne with dignity, for the good collegian is known from the negligent one by his gait: *Incessu patuit dea*. The glance also must be modest, for it is dangerous to pry with inquisitorial gaze into the concerns of those whom we pass in the street; and, furthermore, it is a great impertinence to look straight in the eyes of anyone with whom we are speaking. And, in accordance with the maxim, *Sapiens vix tacite ridebit*, etc. —namely, 'The wise man laughs rarely, and in silence'— laughter must be moderated.

I have not used the word 'must' so continually simply to save myself the trouble of finding another and a better, but because the Superior demanded nearly all these observances of the students in the name of 'duty.' To fall short in any one of them was to be guilty of sin. 'These,'

[1] In allusion to Adam's apron of fig-leaves.

he would say, 'are the elementary duties of youthful decorum and of priestly decency.'

Charles during that year, and many times during his course at the seminary, had often to listen to advice as well as to reproach on this head. Fancy anyone expecting boys, who are bubbling over with all the petulance of youth, always to remember to walk with measured steps like their grandfathers!

Several weeks after the beginning of term the eighty newest students were given a trifling subject in philosophy for discussion, the object being to select the seven students, out of the whole number, who should enter the lists and take part in the weekly public tournament, which was held every Sunday morning. Our Abbé was successful in being one of those chosen. There is, in fact, a custom in this seminary which deserves mention. It may be considered a good or a bad custom, according to the point of view, or according to the temperament of the person who passes judgment. Every Sunday, in presence of the entire community, masters as well as pupils, two of the students have to wrangle upon some set theme, such as, for example, the existence of God. One of them always begins in Latin with the following prelude:[1] 'By the command of our very reverend Superior, with the permission of our beloved masters, and emboldened by the goodwill of this assembly, I proceed, my dear fellow-student, to develop this argument,' and so on. Then he proceeds to propound his thesis—in Latin, of course—building upon what he considers to be the soundest arguments. His adversary strives to demolish the pile of syllogisms, and, taking the offensive whenever he can, assays to establish the contrary, *salva amicitia*.

[1] 'Si prius jusserit reverendissimus superior noster, annuerintque dilecti magistri nostri, benigneque faverit ornatissima adstantium corona, sic argumentabor, dilectissime condiscipule,' etc.

As has been already remarked, there may be at once a good side to this custom, and also a bad and a dangerous one. This intellectual tilting requires presence of mind, rapid parry and thrust, a quick perception of the mental eye, so as to fasten upon the weak point. And the mind in this way becomes sharpened. It is the method of St. Thomas Aquinas to set forth in succession the for and the against: first *videtur quod;* then *ego contra.* It is a relic of the theological discussions of the Middle Ages, where the *Magister serotinus* demolished after mid-day the thesis which had been maintained in the forenoon by the *Magister matutinus.* But do not opinions run a danger of being upset by these argumentations? Not to speak of the scepticism which might result from them, although all scepticism may not be dangerous. I refer, of course, to the habit of hair-splitting for its own sake, the unhealthy pursuit of subtleties which leads straight to a casuistry that is the death of morality and of conscience. I leave those who are more clear-sighted than I am to settle this point for themselves as best they can.

Charles soon entered keenly into the interest and excitement of these contests, and from the first discussion put his whole heart into them. His turn of mind generally led him to assume the defensive. Knowing that he was carrying on an adventitious argument, he preferred to feel himself on the solid ground of orthodox and accepted faith. To take the offensive seemed to him nothing more than a clever display of intellectual gymnastics.

The course of study at the Aliesse Seminary occupied two years. The first year scholastic philosophy is studied in the morning, and elementary mathematics, which includes arithmetic, algebra, and geometry, in the evening; while in the second year they have philosophy in the evening and a smattering of physics, chemistry, and natural

history, in the morning. Young Fleury, who had lately been growing very fast, and was not overstrong in consequence, threw himself with such ardour into the work that his health began to break down. He fought bravely against his increasing physical weakness, and his Director did all he could for him, taking a truly fatherly interest in the lad. He let him off several of the supplementary subjects, and obtained for him a more substantial diet than was usually allowed. He was given tonics, and got leave to spend more time in the open air. However, nothing seemed to do him any good. The doctor, as Charles himself had done, thought at first that it was only a passing weakness, but he soon recognised that the lad's state of health was rapidly becoming more and more precarious. Charles would have held on courageously, and have continued his studies notwithstanding, but he began to have fainting fits, and often to spit blood. The doctor thought that he ought to be sent home at once, but, as the year was nearly over, Charles stayed on until he had passed his examinations, when the Superior allowed him to go off for the holidays several days before the usual time.

When the young Abbé arrived at Loirolles, looking so pale and thin, and with such bloodless lips, tired and hollow-eyed, all her joyful anticipations of the priesthood were banished from his mother's mind, and she devoted her energies to the beloved invalid with all the lavish care which a mother's tenderness and ingenuity could devise.

The evil proved to be more deeply seated than had at first been supposed, so that when the vacation came to an end, Charles himself had to admit that he was not strong enough to face a term of nine months at the seminary. The Superior also, who came to see him, discouraged the idea of his immediate return to work. The young Abbé was therefore obliged to give in, and to acquiesce in the

interruption of his studies for what proved to be a period of two years—long years of rest and of nursing back to health.

Charles often passed an afternoon at the parsonage, and the Abbé Peyrard set himself to work upon the young man's mind by trying to make him believe that his illness was a snare of the devil, and that Satan, by withdrawing him for a time from the influence of the seminary, and by forcing him to live in the world—by which he meant his parents' house—was seeking to endanger his vocation.

'Be on your guard,' the Abbé would say; 'be faithful in the performance of your devotions; be ever in thought and desire in that place of prayer and study in which your health does not at present permit you to reside in person.'

Charles followed with submission these counsels of his old confessor, who, since his 'child' had attained to the cassock, no longer treated him with the same patronizing intimacy as of yore. The young man seldom went out, therefore, notwithstanding the childish delight he felt in appearing abroad in his new costume, and in hearing the good people of Loirolles gravely address him as Monsieur l'Abbé. He kept himself as much as possible from contact with the world, keeping in mind a saying which Monsieur Buret loved to quote: *Necesse quodammodo est, etiam religiosa corda de mundano pulvere sordescere* (It is in a manner inevitable that even hearts religiously disposed become soiled by the dust of the world).[1]

After several months had passed away, Charles began to weary of his state of absolute inaction, and when the Superior of the seminary suggested that he should begin to teach Latin to two children belonging to a family in a small village in the neighbourhood, he readily agreed to the proposal, for the sake of getting a little variety into his life.

[1] *Cf.* St. John xiii. 10.

It was during his tutorship of these children that he received his first great shock. The Curé of the parish used often to come to the house, accompanied by his assistant 'vicaires,' or curates, and the card-parties they made up together were endless. 'Virette' was played frantically, and by no means for love; for if they began with pence, it often happened that towards the end of the evening a crown, or even a pound, would be staked on a card. That, however, would usually be on the evenings of a big dinner-party.

All at once the idol Charles had raised in his mind was imperilled, for he had firmly believed that every priest laboriously kept vigil up to a late hour, in accordance with the injunctions laid upon them in the seminary, in the profound study of theology, in reciting the breviary, and in preparing their Sunday sermons. Now he noticed that occasionally one of the card-players would step quickly aside out of the group, and hurry through 'his office' with a few rapid gestures and mutterings because midnight was drawing near! But what a revelation was this for a simple-minded young collegian! Being completely without any gambling interests, the Abbé steadily, but firmly, declined all invitations to join in the worship of the inconstant goddess.

The father of the little pupils had placed his library at the young Abbé's disposal, and he made full use of his opportunities. And, indeed, it contained much to attract and to interest one who had only read the classics. Up to this time the most daring book he had ever made acquaintance with, excepting 'Jérôme Paturot à la Recherche d'une Position Sociale,' was the sentimental production of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, the charming idyll of 'Paul and Virginia.' Here he found gathered together and within his reach the most brilliant productions of the Romantic School,

and he even became familiar with Victor Hugo, Lamartine, and Alfred de Musset. Goethe introduced him to Werther, and Shakespeare to his incomparable heroes. When he had devoured these masterpieces, he attacked the writers of fiction, and of these Alexandre Dumas, Eugène Sue, and Balzac, interested him most. Then, prying into the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, he read with some surprise Renan's 'Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse,' and was captivated by Maxime Du Camp's 'Souvenirs Littéraires,' etc. What he had thrown himself into was, in a word, a very orgie of reading. But it was the unknown in it all that fascinated him—not the fact that it was forbidden fruit, because he had not as yet so much as heard of the 'Index.' All this literature was to him a veritable revelation. Nevertheless, his soul was not in the least troubled by it. He feasted with the fearlessness of innocence, and in entire forgetfulness of self. He even copied out passages which he thought might be useful to him in his future sermons. Therefore it was in complete unconsciousness of wrong-doing that he took the first available opportunity during the next holidays to show his Director his sheaf of extracts, and was amazed to find himself severely snubbed by Monsieur Buret for his pains.

'Unhappy boy, you are becoming worldly-minded!' the Director exclaimed. 'By reading these books by men who are the enemies of religion, and of the Church, you have made a compact with the Evil One. Why did you not first consult me? What have become of all those resolutions you once made never to undertake nor to enter upon anything without first consulting your Director? Give all these papers to me. They must be burned. Would that I could pass your mind through the flame likewise, and thus purge it of every remembrance of these accursed writings!'

'But I did not think I was doing anything wrong.'

'So I quite believe; but it is a proof of what an evil nature you have, that you can gorge yourself with that poisonous food without even recognising it as such.'

'But I did not see any harm in it.'

'How blind you were! Do you not know that to the authority of the Church, who is a better judge of such matters than you are, the decision must be left as to what writings are to be considered hostile to religion, and to be prohibited with jealous care? To read what she has forbidden is pride and rebellion. Even after you are ordained, never read a book without having first sought the advice and obtained the approval of your confessor.'

Charles tried hard to rescue his precious collection of quotations from the flames, but Monsieur Buret was inflexible.

Time went on, and Charles began to feel the long rest acting most beneficially on his health. During his pupils' holidays he tried to take walks with his old fellow-students who belonged to Loirolles. The seminary rule, *Nunquam duo, semper tres* (Never two, always three), was easy to observe, because they were fairly numerous; but another regulation they resolutely set at naught. According to the 'Cautions' issued by the Superior, collegians who have donned the 'holy habit' must behave to one another with respect. The 'thou-ing' and 'thee-ing' that comes so naturally to the lips in childhood must now give place to a more formal manner of address.

'Forget that you have ever been playfellows in childhood,' is the dictum; 'to be "thou-ed" is altogether contrary to the importance of an ecclesiastic.'

Needless to say, long years of habit proved too strong. It was found hopeless even to try to carry out the Superior's instructions in this matter.[1] However, our young Abbé

[1] 'Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurrit' (Although Nature be driven away at the pitchfork point, she will return to her crib).

soon had to give up these long walks. He had over-estimated his strength. He was still very weak. All the same, he determined to resume his studies at all costs. The doctor pronounced the climate of the Rhodane, where the Great Diocesan Seminary of Theology was situated, to be too damp for him—the fogs would be detrimental to his health—and he strongly advised that the invalid should be sent to a warmer climate. Fortunately, the Superior, who took a great interest in the lad, was of the same opinion, so Charles went off at the beginning of term to Africa, taking with him excellent letters of introduction, to 'do theology' in an African seminary, and to seek a complete cure under a hotter sun than that of his native land.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE 'GREAT SEMINARY' OF THEOLOGY

AT the 'Great Seminary' of Bakou, the Director who was chosen by Abbé Fleury, and who came to have a most important influence upon his life, was a Monsieur Balure. This priest won him from the first by the kindly charm of his manner, and our Abbé was drawn to give him his entire confidence.

The term began us usual with a 'Retreat,' and the collegians were plunged into that mystic atmosphere which is the speciality of all seminaries. The Abbé was led to make another general confession to Monsieur Balure from two motives. In the first place, he was starting with a new Director, and he felt that he ought to lay bare his soul to him; and in the next place, he had just passed through two years of sojourn in the 'world.' When the 'Retreat' was ended, Charles applied himself with energy to the study of theology.

At Aliesse the students of philosophy occupied a common dormitory, and they consequently were obliged to perform their morning ablutions in public, and in attire that would strike a stranger as exceedingly comic. They were also subjected to a certain amount of supervision, from one or other of the masters, during the hours of study in the large school-room. Here, however, in this Great Seminary

of Bakou each student had a little room to himself, and no one appreciated this great advance in comfort more than did our Abbé. But, while each had a room to himself, the students were forbidden under any circumstances to visit one another's rooms, on pain of expulsion from the seminary. Before going to borrow a book or to ask a question, permission had to be obtained from the master, who had rooms in the same corridor ; and the communication must be made in a low voice, and from outside the threshold of the door. In reference to this, one of the favourite remarks of the Superior was : 'You must remain in such a position outside the door that a cannon-ball fired along by the wall would take your head off.'

Abbé Fleury once saw a student expelled, who had disobeyed the rule by going into his neighbour's cell, although he had only stayed there a few minutes. In this matter the masters are inexorable.

Outdoor exercise was taken on a very different principle. At Aliesse the philosophy students went out walking in a long string, three abreast, the Superior leading, and the masters dispersed at intervals in the ranks, the whole body keeping together in an unbroken line. Thus three hundred and fifty cassocked figures took the road like a battalion. But at Bakou the students would set out with only one master, whose week it happened to be, at their head, and the Senior Student brought up the rear, and all strictly observed the precept, 'Never two, always three.'

The Senior Student, or Prefect, is a student in his last year. He is either the oldest or the best scholar in the college, and he enjoys a special position in the seminary. He seats the students in refectory, class, and chapel. He receives the mail from the hands of the Superior, and distributes the letters. On him, also, the duty devolves of starting the devotional exercises on the stroke of the hour,

should the Director for the week happen to be absent. In seminaries there is no compounding with the hours. The Prefect is, in fact, made responsible for all small details. To return once more to the subject of out-door exercise: it is the Prefect who carries the money, collected from the students before starting, and distributes it to the beggars whom they may meet on the road, in the name of the whole party. When they have walked two or three miles a halt is made, and the master, fixing a time and place of meeting, sets the students at liberty. They may now go anywhere they please within a radius of three-quarters of a mile, except, of course, that no house may be entered, and nothing may be purchased but fruit. I do not know if this plan is adopted in any seminary in France, and I do not think it probable. This small amount of liberty was occasionally abused, to the extent of a cigarette or two—even at the risk of drawing down the lightning of an outraged bye-law.

Beginning with the first meal after the opening Retreat was over, one performance provided the Abbé with great amusement. The older students, perched in the Reader's box in the refectory, had each in his turn to preach a sermon which he had composed during the vacation. What could be funnier than to see one of those surpliced orators, looking as a rule nervous and ill at ease, opening his first campaign in the midst of the clatter of crockery, and before an audience prosaically busy with knife and fork? What could be more upsetting for the unfortunate beginner, than the fear lest he should make himself ridiculous, and at the same time run the risk of a rebuke from the master, should he show himself too cool and collected; and, above all, with the certainty that, if he were conceited enough to take himself and his sermon seriously, his fellow-students would not fail to make endless jokes at his expense? For

students at religious seminaries, by reason of their being kept from the rough and tumble of the world, always remain children in many ways, and, like children, are merciless on occasion.

It would be an odious thing were collegians, vested in the 'sacred habit,' to have their letters delivered to them unsealed ; therefore the Abbé Fleury at Bakou, as well as at Aliesse, received his letters unopened. But a system which rests on prying never allows itself to be baulked. The priestly instinct is to know everything, and to accomplish this endless investigations are made. It is worthy of notice that the Superiors made no effort to evade this disagreeable and unworthy side of their duties. More than once our Abbé thought he had observed that his letters had been tampered with, so one day he opened his mind on the matter to Monsieur Balure, his Director. 'One might think, indeed,' he said, 'that this letter had passed through the black chamber. See how badly it is fastened down.'

'Absurd!' replied the Director ; 'how can you have got hold of such an idea as that?'

'Doubtless I am mistaken,' our Abbé persisted ; 'but if letters are to be broken open here, why is it not done openly, as it was in the "Little Seminary," where, if it does seem more brutal, it is at least less dishonourable?'

One day, however, the truth of his suspicions was clearly proved, for, having gone to clear himself of the accusation that he had smuggled two bottles of liqueur into the seminary, the Superior barefacedly said to him : 'How can you deny it, seeing that you afterwards received a letter announcing that the bottles had been sent to you?'

He alluded to a letter in which the father of the young Abbé's two former pupils had promised to send him two bottles of chartreuse as a New Year gift. The Abbé had written back at once to say that all liqueurs, e en digestive

ones, were prohibited. None had therefore been despatched The Superior had not read both letters, but he had certainly opened the first one.

Again, every morning, during the time when the students were at 'meditation,' the masters, through the same prying instinct, stooped to practise a base and impudent piece of deceit. They would enter all the cells, and make a thorough search among the student's possessions, even making use of false or skeleton keys for the trunks, like common thieves. It was, no doubt, because their moral sense was not wholly dead, and that they still retained some sense of the odious baseness of that performance, that they tried to make 'perquisition' in what house-breakers would call 'a proper manner.' But they were not always successful in obliterating the traces of their handiwork. If Professors of the Great Seminary, priests of Jesus Christ, let themselves sink to the level of blackguards, is it strange that the students should in their turn become artful dodgers, and retaliate by trying to outwit their superiors? One would have a hiding-place for chocolate behind a devotional picture in the room where prayers were said; another would stow his provender under the very desk of his Professor. A third always kept a little rum in a bottle nakedly exposed on the mantlepiece, but greasy on the outside, with a great label on it for the Professor's benefit, setting forth that it was cod-liver-oil! Another, irreverently, made a tall statue of the Virgin his accomplice. The statue was hollow, and it proved to be a hiding-place above suspicion. What more could the Director do, when he passed by, but bow reverently before the Queen of Heaven, who watched over the pious owner of this particular cell?

The purpose of these secret domiciliary visits is doubtless in part to discover whether the students carry on any clandestine correspondence; but it is mainly in order that

the authorities may find out whether any forbidden books are being read. But why, in the name of all that is mysterious, make a pretence of respecting the privacy of students, and at the same time distrust them so completely as to think it necessary to spy upon them, as if they were a set of the vilest hypocrites?

The Abbé Fleury had scarcely done with the liqueur business, when he was implicated in an affair about cigarettes. Yielding one afternoon to the seduction of a little smoke, he with a companion retired to a secluded spot in the seminary grounds to enjoy a few puffs. They were informed against by a fellow-student, and when accused Charles made no attempt to deny it. His companion in guilt was expelled on the spot, while Charles's own fate hung in the balance for two days. The Professor who superintended his studies, and who was pleased with his class work, and also his Director, who had a personal liking for him, both put in a good word for him, with the result that he was spared this special form of disgrace. Still, an offence such as that of cigarette-smoking, and that actually within the very walls of the college garden, could not pass unpunished. So that evening at the devotional reading Charles was obliged publicly to ask the pardon of the assembled community for the scandal he had caused; and then the Superior, after delivering the regulation philippic, harked back to his favourite jeremiad, pointing out how the spirit of the world can insinuate itself even into the sanctuary.

The Abbé did not permit these passing worries to draw him away from steady application to his work. The climate of Africa had done so much for his health that he completely gave up trying to spare himself in any way. Quite at the beginning of the course he had been given the treatise 'Concerning the Church' for dogmatic theology,

and for moral theology the treatise 'Concerning Penitence.' Charles found that two texts were used as keystones for arches of tremendous span—namely, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build My Church'; and, 'Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,' and so on. The structure reared thereon seemed to him to rest upon a weak foundation, and he considered the arguments brought forward were superficial and unconvincing. On the other hand, the objections that could be urged against them appealed very strongly to his mind, and the answers that were supposed to demolish these objections seemed to him quite beside the mark, and often sophistical. The young man's mind became much disturbed by these impressions; he required stronger and more convincing proofs. Instead of being, as usual, content to repeat his lesson without comment, he went so far as to ply his master with embarrassing questions, and candidly to express his difficulties.

The Professor replied with blustering affirmations, with evasions, or with the slashing dictum, intended to demolish at a single blow all argument, 'It is a question of faith,' or 'It is an article of belief.' But when the Abbé still pressed for a plain explanation, and for more apposite arguments, the Professor waxed irritable, especially when he observed that the students were in sympathy with their fellow-pupil; so he made a rule, then and there, that no abrupt questions were to be put to him in class hours, but that when anyone had objections to make they were to be put on paper, and tabulated in syllogistic form, when they would be answered by him when the class next met. The Professor was quite within his right; and some of the students—and among these was the Abbé—set out their questions as best they could in the manner required, the Professor replying in like manner, but without giving the

questioners much satisfaction; for often the answers were equivocal, and would wind up to the effect that such and such an argument could not be entertained. 'It is a matter of faith. The discussion is closed.'

One evening the Abbé was sent for by his Director. The Professor had probably complained of him.

'What is this that I hear?' said Monsieur Balure. 'It seems that you have been playing the Protestant in class!'

'I do not know anything about that,' Charles replied; 'but I wanted to see my way clearly.'

'Unhappy boy! If you begin to reason, you will lose your faith,' exclaimed the Director. 'Of course I know that discussion is allowed, but only with the fixed intention of unhesitating and unreserved acceptance the moment the Church has spoken. But even *then* it is a dangerous game.'

'That may be,' Charles persisted; 'but my mind cannot be brought to think that a thing is right which does not appear to be right.'

'I tell you that is an illusion of pride, a snare of the devil,' the Director asserted vehemently. 'Human reason is perilous to faith. To err is human; to persist in error is devilish. Let yourself be convinced once for all that you are opposing truth, that you are mistaken, whenever it seems to you that you cannot fully accept the statements laid down by the authority you are studying. *Roma locuta est: causa finita est* (Rome has spoken; the matter has been decided, once for all). Then, again, consider what a bad example you are setting your fellow-students. Above all, beware of curiosity in the study of theology. There are some who, through wishing to understand everything, have slid down the steep declivity of doubt into the deep abyss of heresy.'

So the Abbé tried to be more humble, in order to save

his faith and his vocation. To reason about everything, he was told, was to expose one's self to peril; and he had no desire to be lost. Therefore he buried all indiscreet questions in the most secret recesses of his heart.

God be thanked that these doubts never were really effaced from his mind! At a later date they again came to the surface, and were as persistent as ever. The day came when to satisfy them became imperative: when he was *compelled* to use his reason, when he was forced to lose faith—faith in the Church of Rome.

Abbé Fleury had a pious nature. There is a rule in all seminaries that the students take it in turn to clean the chapel, the object of this being to inculcate a love and a respect for the 'holy place.' Surpliced as for a function, these young Abbés clean and tidy up the sanctuary, removing the wax droppings from the candelabras and dusting the statues. Piety which took this particular form of expression did not appeal to some of the students, and these sulked, as much as they dared, at having to go through this performance; but our Abbé accepted it as a religious duty, pleasing to God. It certainly does seem somewhat incongruous and out of place that surpliced collegians should be made to move about the house of God brandishing brooms and feather brushes, and genuflecting the hundred and one times that they have to pass in front of the tabernacle.

What gave the Abbé most pleasure in his life in this seminary were the devotional readings. The books selected were always deeply mystical, after the nature of the tract by Roderiguez entitled the 'Traité de la Perfection Chrétienne. If collegians were not taught to be men, there was certainly a strong effort made to make angels of them. In lectures on asceticism they were crammed with such stuff as this: 'Avoid all young women, or else like them all equally well.

A religious love engenders friendliness; friendliness leads to a strong desire to be pleasing; this in its turn produces familiarity; and familiarity grows into carnal affection.' These, and many other similar maxims, were delivered to the students in Latin in words that every true man must condemn. Nothing then was left but Love Divine; and in seeking to attain to Divine Love, to the exclusion of all natural affection, is it surprising if priests become cold and selfish, out of sympathy with ordinary humanity; and that, while trampling down in their own hearts all earthly forms of affection, they end by losing all power to love, even the capacity for entertaining that Divine Love with which they were all along desiring to be filled.

The year at Bakou ended with examinations. Then came the dog-days, when all the collegians sailed for France.

Charles had never before been so long separated from his mother, so that when she saw him once more, as strong and hearty as ever, she could not help crying over him for very joy. However, tears of another kind were soon to flow from her eyes, very bitter tears indeed. It happened during the vacation, and the incident was of such a kind, and took such hold of her son's life, that the precious vocation narrowly escaped foundering altogether. The students for the priesthood, whose homes were at Loirolles, as we have already said, visited at one another's homes, and sought no companionship outside their own number. Our Abbé found himself inventing excuses for going very often to the house of one of his fellow-students. Why should he prefer this particular house above all others? What was the special attraction? At first he thought nothing at all about it, and afterwards, when the truth suddenly dawned upon him, it was, unhappily, too late to undo the mischief, and the poor lad had naught left but to measure the extent

of the damage, by the quickened beating of his pulses whenever a fair profile chanced to reflect itself upon his thoughts.

She who had won his love was his friend's sister, a young lady as innocent as she was lacking in self-consciousness. The Abbé should have fled, but he stayed on. He had completely lost his heart. However, the vacation came to an end without a single word of what was in their hearts having passed between them. Their inward feelings alone betrayed themselves by tender glances and lingering hand-clasps. The Abbé even adventured so far as to perpetrate poetry. Indeed, this was throughout a most characteristic symptom of his malady.

But, alas! inexorable fate compelled his return to the seminary. What should he do? His vocation called him in one direction; his heart insisted on impelling him in another. Charles was not long in making up his mind. He went back to the seminary, and confessed everything to his Director, Monsieur Balure.

'Dear boy,' said the latter, 'your soul is very sick. The flame that is devouring you is burning too strongly to last, however. It will, I think, soon burn itself out. Separation, time, and study will cure you. All the same, I do not wish to be hard on you. If you want to go, go. God's will will manifest itself. If this is merely a trial of your faith, you will return to us.'

The poor Abbé suffered martyrdom at the thought of the sorrow it would give his mother, and of how it would scandalize Loirolles, if he were to quit the cassock. On the other hand, his heart was so sick that it set his thoughts all of a whirl, and he actually started for Loirolles. When his mother saw him come into the house without his cassock, at a time when she thought he was safely in the seminary, a horror overcame her; she gave one cry of anguish, and,

clutching at her breast, sank fainting to the floor. Charles sprang forward to her assistance, but his mother lay quite still, without giving any sign of life.

'Go to your room,' his father said sternly, 'and wait there till I come.'

Charles went, and there, in his little room, although his eyes were wet with tears, and his heart was full of misery, he still firmly adhered to his resolve to obey the prompting of his heart and the dictates of his reason, notwithstanding that he felt the circumstances with which he was surrounded were somewhat disconcerting. Meanwhile his mother had returned to consciousness, and would listen to nothing until she had seen her son.

'What has happened, you wretched boy?' she cried. 'Have you been expelled from the college?'

'Not at all, mother. I left entirely of my own accord.'

The poor woman could not believe her ears. 'What do you mean by saying you have left of your own accord? And why without your cassock? Good God! what does it all mean?'

'It means, mother, that I want to do my time of military service, and then marry.'

Charles thought it best to make a clean breast of it at once, and let one telling do. Two great tears rolled down his mother's cheeks. 'You have ceased to love your mother, then,' she said sadly. Charles tried to take her in his arms as he used to do; but she pushed him away, gently but firmly, and then sat down and cried long and bitterly.

Charles, who could not endure to see his mother's grief, broke down completely, and hastily left the room, sobbing as he went, very miserable at having brought such sorrow upon his mother.

Meanwhile his sister had gone off to break the news to

Abbé Peyrard. The old Curé was having his daily siesta when she arrived, but on hearing what she had to say he jumped up instantly, heedless of the fact that he had not had half his usual rest, and started off in hot haste for the Fleurys' house, as if he were manning a lifeboat sent out to rescue a drowning sailor in mid-ocean.

'You miserable boy!' he said, as soon as he had shut the door behind him, and the two were alone together. 'Have you taken leave of your senses? Dry these tears, speak up, and answer me. Hide nothing from me. Remember I am your old friend;' and Abbé Peyrard began as of old to use the affectionate 'thou' instead of the formal 'you,' so as to seem more fatherly.

'I do not wish any longer to be a priest,' Charles said doggedly.

'And why so? Come, tell me everything, as if you were at Confession. My heart has not changed to you, and God will forgive you, if you have committed a great sin.'

Charles drew himself up at once. 'Monsieur l'Abbé,' he answered, 'I have not committed a sin. I believe that I love Abbé Louit's sister, and, as I do not think that I can live without her, I wish to serve my term, and marry.'

'Is that all?' cried the old Curé much relieved. 'Is there nothing else?'

'That is absolutely all, Monsieur l'Abbé.'

'Well, you have taken a great weight off my mind. I was afraid that you had been sent down. Listen to me, my dear Charles. I tell you, you are in a fair way to commit one of the greatest of follies. There, now, do not be angry. I must lance the abscess and let out the pus.'

'But I tell you that I think I am in love.'

'Well, well, who denies it? Can you not listen to reason for five minutes? Do you wish to be the death of your mother? Do you wish to go to hell?'

'But I am free to do as I choose, and marriage is no sin,' Charles persisted. 'As for my mother, I and God together will manage to comfort her.'

'What a blind bat you are!' cried the exasperated Curé. 'Of course marriage is not a sin. But it is not for *you*. Your vocation is to be a priest. Have you forgotten that to be faithless to one's vocation is to withdraw from God's favour? That it is to fall from a state of grace, and to expose one's self to certain peril?'

'I do not know how to answer.'

'Well, then,' the priest resumed, 'in God's name, I tell you once more, the priesthood is your vocation. The expressions you make use of—"I think," "it seems to me"—prove that the whole thing is nothing but illusion and mirage. The devil, seeing the day of your subdiaconate drawing near, is staking his last card on the weakness of your heart, and your heart has mounted to your head.'

Then, gently, with extreme lightness of touch, Abbé Peyrard rehearsed all the old arguments, well aware that the same ideas, wisely repeated, would impress this adolescent brain, on whose fashioning he had bestowed so much labour. And when he thought his efforts had succeeded, he said quite naturally and quietly:

'You will now, my dear boy, resume your cassock at once, and will go and kiss your mother. Stay by her while I set out for Rhodane. This evening I shall see the Provincial of the Josephists, and you shall be admitted either as a master or as a superintendent into one of their colleges. In a year's time, if you are still of the same mind with regard to marriage and the barracks, we will see about making the change. But in the meantime give my plan a trial. I feel certain that by the end of the year you will be willing to take up residence again in the Great Seminary.'

So saying, the Abbé Peyrard quietly drew poor Charles's

cassock out of his trunk, and, continuing all the time to wheedle and cajole the lad, vested him in it. Charles meanwhile remained quite passively in the priest's hands. The Curé then opened the door, and led the young Abbé to his mother.

'You dear little mother,' the priest said, 'I bring your boy back to you. Dry your eyes; trust me; I will put everything right. Your son intends to be a priest, after all.'

So the Curé set out then and there, and on the morrow young Abbé Fleury took the train for Sainoise to assume the duties of superintendent. Thus Abbé Peyrard, thanks to the authority he had acquired over the youth by long years of influence, succeeded in enticing the straying lamb back to the fold.

And there the idyll ended.

CHAPTER V

AT THE JOSEPHIST COLLEGE

THE Abbé was soon fully occupied with his duties as superintendent. The Superior of the college, who came from his own neighbourhood, paid him much attention. The Head Superintendent of the middle division had been an old fellow-student at Montbaran before he had become a Josephist, and their intimacy soon ripened into friendship, so that the Abbé gradually became calmer in spirit, and the impressions that had lately been so keen began to wear off.

This great College of Sainoise was a preparatory school for those who were intended for the State school, and was much sought after, being quite filled with over four hundred pupils. The teachers of the special subjects were masters indeed, and with the help of lay teachers, who had received a thorough training in method, they gained a large measure of success.

There was, however, in this combination much to give rise to jealousy, for the teachers of such a mixed staff could not fail to be affected by the spirit of emulation, and they would endeavour to score successes for their own pupils. Personal likes and dislikes, and personal magnetism, gave one a greater influence over his pupils than another, and this led to some masters being greater favourites with the

boys than others. Rivalries were thus created amongst the members of the teaching staff.

Naturally, the pupils took sides, and intrigued to gain success for a master who happened to be in favour, or to let down the unpopular one. Nor was the Superior himself exempted, for one afternoon the college broke out into open rebellion. The pupils had been drawn up in order, ready to be tailed off into their classes, but when the superintendents gave the signal to march nobody moved; and on the repetition of the order there was a general shout of 'Down with Principal Michault!' Then, to the unutterable astonishment of the nonplussed superintendents, the whole four hundred scholars dispersed with one consent, tearing like mad things through corridors and class-rooms, studies and play-rooms, shouting continuously, 'Down with Principal Michault!' They burned him in effigy; they let off fireworks; and, being once fairly started in revolt, no remonstrance or appeal to reason could stop them. At night they locked themselves up in the dormitories. Next day the school was broken up and closed for a week. As soon as it was reopened sixty pupils were expelled; nevertheless, eight days later a new Superior was appointed.

During the year that Abbé Fleury passed at the Sainoise College there was no repetition of such exciting scenes. There were offenders and punishments, but neither conspiracy nor rebellion.

As is usual with most of the educational establishments in France, a colony of nuns lived in the college annexe. These were never seen except on Wednesdays and Saturdays, when they changed the bed-linen in the dormitories. But their services were freely requisitioned in the vestry as menders of surplices and altar linen, and in cases of sickness they were invaluable. The infirmary Sister had a great reputation, and nothing had done so much to keep up the

number as for the Superior to be able truthfully to assure the mothers of prospective pupils that, should their boys ever be out of health, they might rest assured that the invalids would be as well looked after as if they were at home.

Notwithstanding these advantages, our Abbé observed some shadows resting on this sunny picture. He soon perceived that there were dissensions among the Professors —that is to say, chiefly among those of them who belonged to a religious Order. As it has been said, 'The "Religious"[1] are creatures who meet together without salutations, live together without love, and part from one another without regret;' and, as the saying is current in the clerical world, it is probably not far from the truth. The 'Religious,' then, were at the bottom of the mischief. They might not go out into the town without the Superior's permission, and if one went out oftener than the rest, this gave rise to an accusation of favouritism. Another could not have more frequent interviews than the rest with the Superior, without the cry of partiality being raised. The worst of it was that, if one of the 'Fathers' was sent for to see the parents of pupils in the parlour somewhat frequently, every ill-natured tongue was set wagging, and 'He wants to play the Superior, and get promotion,' or 'He is going to talk scandal, and get himself talked about,' were the remarks that would be bandied about. But that was nothing at all compared with the advice and warnings that would at times be showered upon an imprudent confrère, either for his own good or in the interests of the community; and all from the most charitable motives, of course. Every little act came under prying eyes, and even the numbers of letters anyone received would be discussed, or commented upon, behind his back, under the cloak of friendship or of religion. Even if no

[1] Those who have taken vows, such as of poverty and of celibacy, etc.

attempt was made to traduce, what further could they have done, had they been so minded? None of these little underhand ways escaped the notice of the pupils. The evilly disposed amongst them, who were cunning enough, made use of the mutual antipathies of the masters for their own advantage; while the masters were in some cases foolish and base enough to confide their animosities to a pupil, thus destroying whatever respect he had for the masters, and at the same time weakening their own authority by these imprudent confidences. The spirit of disparagement and of envy and malice, working from above downwards, spread the seeds of disunion and discord far and wide.

The 'Religious' were at the root of this evil. Religious instruction was one of the principal features of the Sainoise curriculum. Three times a week all had to be present at Mass. They would join in the singing, and sing heartily, although the religious feeling was not deepened by this exercise. Some went only because they were obliged, and looked upon the service as a weariness to the flesh. Others went for the sake of variety, without any devotional fervour. On all other days assistance at Mass was voluntary, and some used it as a means of currying favour.

To many, again, Confession was a matter of calculation. On certain feasts and saints' days there was a general Communion, and on the eve of these Confession was obligatory—that is to say, compulsory; at all other times the pupils were free to go to Confession or not, as they chose. But that freedom was illusory and a mere pretence, for no pupil could take advantage of it and not be quickly subjected to mean and petty annoyances. If, on the other hand, a pupil made frequent Confessions, he soon found out that there was no better way of gaining favour with the masters. No wonder, therefore, that some abused it by an unreasonable frequency, and, instead of being improved by

it, obtained merely a false reputation for piety—a reputation which set them above the reach of being suspected of complicity in any mischief, but which did not raise them above a meanness that could stand silently by while others were being punished for wrong-doing for which they themselves alone were responsible.

The habit thus formed in the heart and mind of these young people was therefore not a purely religious one. It was merely a habitual performance of devotional exercises. Not religion, but religiosity, or, as one might say, superstition; for at this seminary they were also taught to give 'ninths,' or to burn candles to some saint, in order to secure success in their examinations. One pupil would be advised to communicate six Tuesdays running, in honour of Saint Louis de Gonzaga, and so take shelter behind his virtues; another would be recommended to wear some medal or scapulary, in order to insure health or a good memory, than which superstition or fetichism could go no further. Never once was our Abbé told that a duty should be done for duty's sake, but the ideas of reward and punishment were always thrust into the foreground. For these youths ripening into manhood, self-interest was always treated as the strongest motive power; never was any appeal made to what was high or noble, only to what was mean and unworthy, to mere personal advantage. How can that be called education? Is that the way to elevate the mind, to form the character, or to instruct the conscience? Only twelve months after leaving the college, what became of that devotional habit, which had been so laboriously constructed, might have been seen from a narrow observation of the behaviour of former pupils at the annual reunion. These young men behaved, as a rule, with a well-bred decency, but as for devoutness, or for any thought that God was present in His temple, there was not a sign.

The young men who had formerly seemed so pious had lost all piety, and even in many cases had become unconscious sceptics, only not quite ready openly to label themselves as unbelievers. At college they had gone through devotional exercises, and had made many confessions which now they considered suitable only for women and children. So far as those particular duties are concerned, they had become absolutely irreligious, although they did not openly avow it. But because they kept in touch with their former masters, they were still reckoned champions of the Catholic religion in the world. And there may be some truth in that, for, although it may seem a paradox, there certainly are religious fanatics who at heart are irreligious, and of such are many young men who have been trained at religious colleges. They never entirely forget that, as members of the college 'Guard of Honour,' they become 'chevaliers,' Papal officers. Their early honours, their first steps in advancement, and their youthful decorations, ever remain in their minds as happy memories, and they continue to be the Pope's defenders. It is to their interest so to be, for a marriage with a devout heiress, and rapid promotion, are not always in this world the result of steady work and personal merit, as may easily be proved. The 'basket' for the wedding presents is very often woven in the parlour of the Holy Fathers, and there you may obtain the earliest information concerning the coming betrothal. They are without personal religion, but they outwardly remain defenders of the Church, because to be so enters into their plans, and is a means of securing material success.

Therein, too, lies a danger to society. The Holy Fathers, to whatever school or religious Order they may belong, know what a power here lies to their hand, and one of their cleverest moves was to found the 'Association of Old Pupils.' Once a year, and twice in some towns, these

young men, whose minds they have dominated, to whom they have rendered some service, or to whom it is in their power to offer the prospect of very important aid, dine together; and these 'Old Pupils,' men though they be, take their marching orders from some half-veiled hint or casual remark dropped by their leaders. Ostensibly they meet for a simple and brotherly exchange of opinion, and they possibly even fancy that they will return from the meeting with opinions of their own, whereas they usually bring back into their own surroundings the opinions and convictions of the Holy Father, or, rather, the instructions which these Fathers have received from Rome.

The following event opened Abbé Fleury's eyes to what was going on, and made him reflect seriously. Towards the end of the year the Rhodane Provincial of the Josephists arrived on his customary visitation—an event of great importance for the 'Religious,' for each had to be presented to the great man, and some awaited the occasion with impatience. One, perhaps, wanted to change to another college for reasons of health or of conscience. Another might desire to go out as a missionary, or to some post where he could exercise his priestly office. Another had a complaint against a brother to bring before the Provincial, and most of them had some little grievance to rake up against the Superior. The Provincial would listen to everything with more or less patience, and, as he had already received from the Superior of the House the fullest report, his turn came to accuse the accuser, who had reported against others. He gave hope to some, reproaches to others, and orders to all; and there was no choice but to bow in mute obedience before the sacred commands of the Grand Master.

The part that the Provincial has to play is one that requires skill and tact, and the office is usually filled by a

man who is well advanced in years, of wide experience, and not likely to be surprised by anything that he may hear. His tribunal is raised high above these petty unpleasantnesses, jealousies, and ambitions; and his skill is to be gauged by the vagueness of his replies, which nevertheless satisfy, and by his power to keep hope alive on empty promises, or on the non-committal assurances of a patronage secretary, so that each may come away from the interview soothed, comforted, and satisfied.

As a check upon the authority of the local Superior, the visit of the Provincial is, theoretically, a wise institution, but, unfortunately, it serves chiefly as a dam to hold up, and accentuate, spite and calumny. The more artful members of the community, with discreet adulation, express themselves content with everything and everybody, and by offering this incense at the shrine of authority adopt the surest means of obtaining the fulfilmeut of their desires. It is the same all the world over.

How the Provincial trifled with the Fathers, and contented all in turn by saying white to one and black to another, in answer to the same question, was plain enough to Abbé Fleury, who was a universal favourite, and who in consequence was often obliged to fill the rôle of confidant. On the eve of his departure the Provincial sent for the Abbé, and abruptly, and without preamble, said: 'Monsieur l'Abbé, I have to compliment you. Both the Superior and the class superintendent have warmly testified to the way in which you have performed your duties by your division.'

'It is very kind of the Holy Fathers to say so.'

'I have also been informed,' the Provincial continued, 'that you have given satisfaction in your supplementary class, and I am much obliged to Abbé Peyrard for having introduced you to us.'

'I have only done my best, like everyone else,' the Abbé replied modestly.

'Now, my dear boy,' the Provincial went on, 'I have a proposal to make to you, and perhaps it was by the hand of God that you were led here, that He might show you what He desires your life's aim should be. Rather than incur the dangers of a parochial ministry, would you not prefer to enter our Society, and begin your novitiate at once? Let me finish, my son. I know that the dream of your life is to provide a comfortable and a tranquil old age for your parents, in a little country benefice; and it is quite a legitimate ambition. Even this is not beyond our power to arrange for you. Our Society will make them a small yearly allowance, beginning from the day on which you take your vows. I give you herewith our Society's formal pledge and assurance for it. What do you think of that?'

'Your proposal takes me completely by surprise, as you may suppose, reverend Father. I would never have imagined such a thing. I have never felt any drawing towards the life of a Religious, and, moreover, I have no vocation for it.'

'The vocation will come to you during your novitiate,' affirmed the priest. 'Besides, I think you have already given evidence that you have the vocation, by the work you have done here.'

'I do not know to what your reverence refers. But it may be as you say.'

'Go, my son, think over it, pray over it, consult the Superior, and if you decide to follow my suggestion, the Society is ready to receive you. Kneel down, and let me give you my blessing. . . .' With this the interview was closed.

After this interview with the Provincial, the Abbé recalled to mind that several times during the past months the Superior of Sainoise had, in one way or another, hinted that he would make a good Josephist; but at the time Charles

had attached no importance to the remark, having determined that he would go back to the Great Seminary at Bakou.

In his regular fortnightly correspondence with Monsieur Balure, he had kept but one thing in view, namely, his intention to finish his theological studies where he had begun them. Nevertheless, he now asked advice for conscience' sake—a conscience so fettered that he might not decide anything for himself. The Sainoise Superior said yes; Abbé Peyrard replied with all but no; Monsieur Balure left him free. Yet it was his great friendship for the latter that finally decided him. He made up his mind to thank the Provincial for his kindly intentioned offer, but to decline it definitely, and to re-enter the college at Bakou.

The offer was unmistakably friendly and flattering, but was it altogether disinterested? Had the Provincial nothing but the future welfare of Abbé Fleury in view? Was not his chief aim rather that of obtaining a promising addition for his staff? Possibly he may have taken both considerations into account, and possibly, also, they may have weighed unequally in the balance of his judgment. In a country where there is no Poor Law, to provide for the old age of parents is a duty which religious societies cannot evade, and justly so, for do not these religious Societies benefit altogether and entirely by the youth, the labour, and the life, of those who serve them. But do the religious societies, while recognising this duty in theory, always meet their liabilities in practice? To fulfil the above-mentioned charge is their bounden duty, but a later experience taught Abbé Fleury that religious societies occasionally manage to shuffle out of it.

The day after the distribution of prizes the Abbé wrote the Provincial a polite letter of thanks, and set out for Loirolles, intending, when the vacation was over, to re-enter the Great Seminary of Bakou.

CHAPTER VI

ORDINATION

IN the following October Monsieur Balure received the runaway with open arms, and, taking care to make no allusion to the young man's temporary aberration, he only enjoined him to work hard, to pray without ceasing to the Blessed Virgin, and to come frequently and open his heart to him.

The Abbé applied himself with avidity to the study of theology, determined to master, and to retain in his mind, all his author's points and arguments, resolutely shutting the windows of his soul whenever a close inspection of their subtleties would have unsettled him. And in this he but followed the constant advice of Monsieur Balure.

The following April he received an order from the Superior to visit him in his study, and he, after a few introductory remarks, addressed him solemnly to the following effect: 'Monsieur Fleury, the council has made its decision: you are called to the Tonsure.'

The Abbé, quite overcome by this sudden intelligence, hurriedly returned his thanks, rushed off to the chapel, where, kneeling before the Blessed Virgin, he poured out his joy and thankfulness to heaven for the great mercy vouchsafed to him. Monsieur Balure, who had been awaiting his coming, took him tenderly in his arms, and congratulated

him warmly, inciting him to prepare himself for what was before him with redoubled care and watchfulness.

From the young man's notes and impressions written at this period, we select the following :

'"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall rise up in His Holy Place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." I am about to take the first step of the ascent to the Holy Altar, and how do I stand? Devoid of all virtue, and my soul scored by the venomous darts of sin. What then am I, O my God! that Thou shouldest look upon me with such mercy and pity? Thou seest that I have nothing, nothing at all but sins. I have sounded the very depths of the pit. I was a long time wandering, and yet Thou fetchedst me back; I fled from Thee, and yet Thou hast followed and found me; I spurned Thee, but yet Thou heldest me fast; I wrestled against Thee, but Thou castedst me not off. I thought to loose myself from the strong cords of Thy love, and Thy Divine power has built a wall around my vocation.

'All this, O my God! I have done, and Thou forgavest me. Now how do I stand? God would have me give up all to Him, that I might keep myself for Him alone, and I try to keep myself for myself, who am my own greatest enemy.

'If I keep back but one thing only, I am a knave. I am a hypocrite if I depart from singleness of purpose; a traitor if my renunciation be not unreserved; and if I do not surrender myself entirely I am a coward. O Lord Jesus, I give myself wholly to Thee, through my Director! Thou gavest Thy life for my love. I would die to myself for love of Thy love.'

The day of ordination came, and the Abbé went up to the Bishop, repeating in all sincerity the verse from Psalm xvi., 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance

and of my cup,' and, bending his head to the holy scissors, the Bishop shore off four locks of hair in cruciform, after which Charles, beside himself with ecstatic joy, received the white surplice from the hand of the celebrant with the words: 'Put on the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness, holiness, and truth' (Eph. iv. 24). Then Charles prostrated himself, and returned to his place, giving thanks to Heaven.

In the following June Abbé Fleury was made a sub-deacon. In the ordinary course he would have had to wait for this until Christmas, but circumstances decided otherwise.[1] This was in the year 1889, and at this time the Legislative Chambers were discussing a Bill which had been formulated in the spirit of equality and of sound justice, in which it was proposed to make all seminary students serve their time, either with the colours or in the navy.

The Great Seminary of Bakou was within the jurisdiction of a Bishop who decided to anticipate the usual day of ordination, and by so doing place as many seminary students as possible outside the scope of what would shortly become a legal enactment. He did not call them forward individually, but in a mass.

Now let us note the adroitness of the man. Two months later, when the Bill became law, he wrote a sententious and magniloquent letter inculcating submission to the law, on the ground of respect due to the governing body.

Our Abbé and his fellow-students alike were surprised at this unlooked-for summons, for in seminaries no knowledge is taken of politics, and it is the rarest thing for a small item of news to penetrate to their ears in some

[1] The times for ordinations are the Saturdays of the four seasons, the Saturday before Passion Sunday, and Holy Saturday. Minor Orders may be given on any Sunday or double feast-day.

roundabout way. To introduce a newspaper into a seminary is almost to risk expulsion, and the only periodical for which the pupil may subscribe is *Le Messager du Sacré Cœur!*

To Abbé Fleury, now completely under the spell of his vocation, this news came as a blessing direct from heaven; and in his secret heart he began to prepare himself by prayer for this ordination to the subdiaconate, which would finally decide his life. It is indeed the principal ordination. It is the crossing of the Rubicon. Once a subdeacon, you are one for eternity. It is impossible to turn back; the step is irrevocable. You are bound to the Church by indestructible fetters. It is the first of the great Orders. The subdiaconate may almost be said to beget certain duties, such as the absolute chastity that must be preserved till death, and the daily reading of the breviary as long as life shall last. Obligatory prayer, obligatory purity—such is the subdiaconate. But celibacy is mistaken for chastity, and repetitions of deprecatory formulæ for prayer.

Some of the impressions received by the Abbé during the preparatory Retreat are thus set down in his note-book on the eve of his ordination: '"Thou hast made me for Thyself, O Lord, and my heart is unquiet until it find rest in Thee." Have not I proved the truth of that cry of the great St. Augustine? Peace the world cannot give; Thou art its only source. The world slays, and Thou art the fountain of living water springing up into eternal life. How can I thank Thee, most loving Saviour, for having called me to Thy service?

'When I fled from Thee, what did I find? I found, alas! weariness, bitterness, and vanity. The world I am renouncing can give me nothing; it can neither satisfy the mind nor pacify the heart. It awakens desire, inflames the appetite, excites the imagination with illimitable promises of

happiness. But never is desire crowned, nor appetite satisfied, nor promise fulfilled.

'Thou, O my God, hast made me for Thyself, and Thou hast made my soul to long for great things, with a thirst that Thyself alone canst quench.

'As for the mind, with Thee is the well of knowledge: the knowledge that satisfies, not the knowledge that tends to restlessness and dissatisfaction; the knowledge of the saints of God, not the so-called science that digs a pit for the destruction of all faith.

'Thou art the Way, the Truth, and the Life. O Eternal Truth, those that follow Thee shall no longer walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life. Thou art the Way. If I follow Thee, I go in the way of welfare and happiness, and stumble not. If I take Thee as my Guide, in the path where my Director leads, I cannot err.

'The whirl of the world caught me in its toils, and carried me off my feet. I was misled by its maxims, and by following its illusions I toppled over the brink of the pit. Hadst not Thou drawn me out thence, I had certainly perished.

'I come to Thee: I take Thee for the lot of mine inheritance. I would carry my cross after Thee; with Thee submit to humiliation and scourging, and with Thee drink the cup of gall and wormwood; with Thee would I suffer.

'I renounce everything. I die to the world. I give Thee all I am, although Thou hast indeed no need of me.

'Thou hast made me for Thyself; to Thee I come wholly, unreservedly, unconditionally, and for ever.'

The next day, being the festival of SS. Peter and Paul, was a great day. First of all the Abbé received the four minor Orders. He was made in succession porter, reader,

exorcist, and acolyte.[1] Then came the solemn moment. The candidates for ordination are vested in a long white alb, and have on the arm dalmatic and maniple. At the words 'Let the candidates for the subdiaconate advance,' they move forward toward the Bishop, and range themselves in a semicircle round the altar, to listen to a long Latin address on the duties of subdeacons. Then the Bishop, turning to the congregation, and still speaking in Latin, calls upon whosoever has objection against any candidate now to urge it. Then, in the silence which follows, the candidates can almost hear the beating of their own hearts, and all are deeply stirred to dumb expectancy, until the tension is relaxed by the Bishop, who, having put on his mitre, addresses to the candidates this question:

'If thou art willing to persevere in thy purpose, draw near.'

Then they take one step forward. And that step is the decisive one. However, on this occasion the conduct of one of the candidates jarred unpleasantly with the proceedings. Instead of advancing, he stood still for a second as if he were hesitating what to do next; then he turned round and went back to his stall.

Both the Superior and his Director darted towards him, but they could make no impression; at the last moment he could not make up his mind to enter the subdiaconate, insisting steadfastly that he was not ready.

The ceremony thenceforward followed its normal course. The eighteen subdeacons prostrated themselves to the ground as one man, and there they lie, stretched out like so many corpses, dead to the world before they have attained to manhood, while over them is chanted a long

[1] Ordained porter after the first lesson, reader after the second lesson, exorcist after the third lesson, acolyte after the fourth lesson, subdeacon after the fifth lesson, Deacon after the Epistle.

litany. Their emotions at such times are often so overstrung that many break out into sobbing, and some are near to fainting. These are rare moments that do not recur in a lifetime; but in the case of Abbé Fleury the feeling of unreality was so keen that he could hardly believe himself to be awake.

Then they all rise up to take part in the actual ordination ceremony. They are vested in the alb, the cord, and the maniple, symbols of innocence, chastity, and good works. The Bishop presents the subdeacon, first, with the book containing the portions from the Epistles used in the Liturgy,[1] for it will be his duty to intone these in public at High Mass; next, with the empty chalice, for it will be his duty to place it upon the altar in readiness for the Holy Oblation. When these ceremonies are over, the Bishop proceeds with the service of the Mass. Abbé Fleury was the subdeacon selected to stand beside the celebrant, and to read with him the Epistle for the day. That office performed, he returned to his place, and, full of joy, applied himself to his breviary.

Two days later the Abbé sailed for France, for the last vacation that he should enjoy before being ordained priest. It is needless to say that it was a supreme joy to his mother to see him act as subdeacon on the following Sunday at High Mass, in the Church of Loirolles. The pride and pleasure of Abbé Peyrard is more easily imagined than described. He loved to stroll out with the Abbé, and to sit by his side in the quiet chestnut avenue, and there with him recite the 'Office.'[2] The aged vicaire[3] took a childish delight in his handiwork, for was not this subdeacon his own creation? Next year the young Abbé

[1] Liturgy is properly the Office for Holy Communion.

[2] The service for prime, lauds, vespers, according to the hour of the day.

[3] Assistant-curate.

would be priest. *Nunc Dimittis*.[1] But that day never came for Abbé Peyrard; a dreadful disease carried him off during the following winter.

When Abbé Fleury returned to Bakou for his last year in the seminary, he was made Senior Scholar, owing, as he thought, entirely to the commanding influence of his Director, Monsieur Balure; but, although otherwise inexplicable, the Abbé soon justified the selection by his work.

At Christmas they ordained him deacon, and placed in his hands the volume of the 'Diaconales.'

Is it not a crime, it may reasonably be asked, to put such suggestive impurity into the hands of young men? All that a diseased imagination can conjure up of the extravagances of fleshly lust is to be found in this treatise 'De Sexto.'[2] Nor is it only monks in the cloistered solitude who give loose rein to their imaginations and to their pens, but such men as Sanchez, Scavini, and even Alphonse de Liguori, are equally guilty of penning these abominations. The modern manuals that were placed in the hands of Abbé Fleury were the handiwork of a Monsignor Bouvier, and to a theologian of St. Sulpice, Monsieur Vincent. In the study of this subject-matter there is no option to refuse. There is an examination on it, and, whether the student likes it or not, the poison must be inhaled.

Of what advantage can such a study be to a priest? The reason given is that, with the knowledge of human nature so gained, the confessor may be enabled to extract a full confession. But, as a matter of fact, prudence is advised in the confessional in putting questions upon such matters.

Through the influence of Monsieur Balure, Monsignor Müller, the leading Vicar-General in the diocese, had taken a particular fancy to Abbé Fleury, and at his ordination to

[1] 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.'

[2] Concerning the Sixth Commandment, namely the Seventh Commandment.

the subdiaconate had given him a superb breviary; and, continuing his generosity during the following year, he began to furnish the Abbé's library. 'His Eminence' is often glad to dispense with the etiquette of the palace, and to unbend in the humble lodging of a theological student. It is a relief to such a personage, when sick of deceit, unreality, and flattery, to come into contact with youthful enthusiasm, and to meet with a sincere filial affection. The motive that actuates a great prelate to make these advances to an insignificant candidate for the priesthood may sometimes, however, be less praiseworthy, and less simple and sincere. Friendship for the student may now and then only cover an attempt to spy upon the Professors. But such was certainly not Monsignor Müller's case. He took a childish delight in drawing out the young men whom he took up, and a still more childish delight in dazzling them with the liberality of his gifts. Monsieur Balure turned everything to account, and, by playing upon this amiable weakness, endeavoured to obtain the most desirable appointments for the protégés whom he 'directed,' at the close of their college careers.

During this last year Monsieur Balure was more friend than master to our Abbé. Although he succeeded in fashioning his pupil's moral character after his own ideal, and in completely subjugating his will, this result was achieved with such wonderful tact, and with such proofs of friendship, that he even managed to establish between them the mutual relation as of father and son. His freedom of manner towards the young man bordering even on familiarity.

The school year ended with the day of ordination. This was the last time the Abbé would appear before the Bishop, but on this occasion he would go out from his presence a priest.

During the whole of the past month the Abbé and his companions had been practising the verbal parts of the Mass, using for this purpose a leaden chalice. The beautiful cup that Monsignor Müller had given him was to be reserved for use at his first high celebration.

At length the day of the 'Retreat' arrived, and the Abbé began in earnest to prepare himself. In pursuance of his promise to Monsieur Balure, he did not fail to make full written notes of his thoughts and feelings, from which we extract the following:

'*Sanctis qui sunt in terra ejus.* It is for the salvation of mankind, whom Thou hast made, that Thou wouldest enlist me in Thy service, and I give myself to Thee, my God, for the salvation of all men. Give me the burning thirst for souls that marked Thy chosen Twelve. Inflame my heart with the zeal that counts no sacrifice too great. Inspire my mind with such prudence that I may avoid all excess, and with wisdom to exercise tact and discretion.

'Grant me, O my God, the sympathy needful wherewith to comfort the afflicted, and the love wherewith to calm the doubting soul. Teach me to melt the hardened heart, and to control and direct aright the warmth of ardent devotion.

'Make me a means of converting souls, that I may snatch the brand from the burning, and from the Evil One his prey, that there may be joy in the presence of the angels of God, and disappointment in hell.

'I shall show to the blind that they are out of the way. I shall make them to feel that death is exhaled from those blossoms of this world whose perfume is lulling them to sleep, and I shall prove to them that they may constantly nauseate themselves with the luscious and tempting fruits of pleasure they seek to enjoy, without satisfying the deepest longings of their souls or the insatiable cravings of their higher nature.

'Bubble fortune, with its outward show and vanities, fascinates the worldly heart, while small and great alike pursue the phantom Happiness that eludes the grasp, tires out her panting and ever empty-handed votaries. I shall point them to the skies, and urge on them the truth that they have "no abiding city here," but are only "pilgrims and sojourners" here below.

'Endow my words, O Lord, with charm to captivate, and with eloquence to convince.

'O my God, I pray and beseech Thee, fill me with a burning thirst for souls!'

The die is cast, and little Charlie of the Clerical School; the Abbé Fleury, the handiwork of Abbé Peyrard; the Loirolles boy of humble origin, is about to become a priest. The prediction made fifteen years ago is to be fulfilled to-day: 'My child, one day thou shalt be a priest.'

The climax of his life has come. Our Abbé has tried his utmost to uplift his soul to a fitting sense of its dread solemnity, but by some unaccountable mystery or fatality all within him is calm and cold. Struggle as he will, no divine tremor, as at former times, foretells to-day the approaching grace of ordination. Fearing lest some impurity of soul might be the cause of this want of fervour, the Abbé went to Monsieur Balure to crave a last absolution, before venturing to cross the threshold of God's house. Then, and not till then, did he proceed to the chapel.

The Office for the Ordination of Priests is most solemn and impressive. The stately pomp with which it has come to be administered has an indescribable power to take possession of the soul, and raise it heavenwards.

It must be admitted that the congregation on such occasions consists mainly of the relatives and friends of the candidates, and that their emotion renders them keenly sensitive to every thought and impression suggested by the

ceremony. But to-day neither the Abbé Fleury nor the majority of his companions, who hailed from France, could enjoy the consciousness of a loving mother's presence and support. To him the congregation consisted merely of onlookers, indifferent or inquisitive, so that he was left untouched by the rush of that electric current of sympathy which multiplies tenfold the impressiveness of such an experience. His soul was left stranded, cold and solitary, and, notwithstanding the solemnity of the place, and of the attendant circumstances, he was even conscious of a sense of amusement, which caused a smile to rise to his lips, at observing a hurried flight to the parsonage to fetch the ampulla of holy oil, when the Bishop, in the middle of anointing the hands of the newly-made priests, found that the supply in the chapel had run short. These minutes of long and dreary waiting destroyed what little our Abbé felt of worship and of fervour. He prayed to God with all his might, to touch his heart and to quicken his devotion; nevertheless, at no time during the ceremony was any real sense of God's presence vouchsafed to him.

'Ut hos electos, benedicere, sanctificare et consecrare digneris,'[1] chanted the Bishop from the Pontifical.[2] And still Charles felt no breathing of the Holy Spirit fan his soul. He held out his hands for the holy unction; he received from the Bishop's own hand the chalice; with the Bishop he repeated the magic words of consecration; but, to his sorrow and dismay, no seraphic rapture ruffled the calm surface of his self-possession. And at the end of the ceremony, when the Bishop laid his hands upon him, giving him the power and authority to remit and to retain sins,

[1] 'May it please Thee to bless, sanctify, and consecrate these chosen ones.'

[2] 'The Roman book of services of Ordination of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, etc.'

he thought he heard a little voice within whisper: 'The sacerdotal position is a usurpation, and its authority is unwarrantable.' At the close of the ceremony the newly-ordained priests advanced to the Bishop, who, attired in his mitre and seated in his episcopal chair, asked them this question: 'Promittisne episcopo tuo obedientiam et reverentiam?'[1]

'Promitto,'[2] Charles replied, and received the Bishop's kiss.

Thus was the soul of the priest claimed, and taken possession of, in the name of reverence and obedience.

After the ceremony, having removed his sacerdotal ornaments, it was the custom for each newly-made priest in turn to give his blessing to all those amongst whom he had studied, they kneeling to receive it.

Even Monsieur Balure, when the Abbé went to him in his room, kneeled down; and Charles, hardly able to control his voice, owing to the emotion caused by such a reversal of the usual procedure, had to pronounce in Latin the liturgical benediction[3] over the bent head of his venerable Director, into whose arms he then threw himself while he poured forth lamentations over the irresponsiveness of his soul.

'It is but a trial of your faith,' said Monsieur Balure. 'Wait till to-morrow, and at your first celebration you will taste a joy unspeakable.'

Before going into hall for dinner, the Abbé sent off a telegram to Loirolles conveying his priestly blessing to his family, and another to Monsignor Müller, for the same purpose, at his own previous request.

[1] 'Wilt thou promise to reverence and obey thy Bishop?'
[2] 'I promise.'
[3] 'The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost be upon you, and remain with you always.'

From this moment the newly-ordained cease to be 'seminarists.' They now take their place at the masters' table, where the Bishop sits as president, and are treated as equals by the Professors, who welcome them with every show of affability. During the recreation-hour they hazard all sorts of guesses as to the appointment that may be in store for them, and each one has his surmises. Some profess to have private information, and others let fall mysterious hints. Our Abbé had learned from Monsieur Balure that, thanks to the good offices of Monsignor Müller, he was destined to be an assistant Curé in the episcopal city. But he said nothing, and it was well for him that he kept the secret to himself, for it turned out after all to be a mistake.

The remainder of the day was passed in prayers, and in interviews with his Director, who made him promise to write out, and learn by heart, all his sermons for the first five years, notwithstanding his natural gift of eloquence. The Abbé gave his promise, and kept it, and it was one of the best things Monsieur Balure ever did for him.

On the morrow he, as Senior Scholar, said his first Mass, which was the special one 'for a society'—*i.e.*, 'La Messe de Communauté.' He was too much engrossed by the ritual to feel any of the promised joy unspeakable. He held Christ's Body in his hands; he drank for the first time of the Heavenly Wine; he broke, and distributed to his fellow-disciples, the Eucharistic Bread; while the whisper still echoed in his heart, 'The sacerdotal position is a usurpation, and its authority is unwarrantable.'

He had been promised the Mount of Transfiguration, and he was as faithless as the nine disciples at the foot of the mountain. Then he sought refuge in the solitude of his cell, and sobbed aloud in the bitterness of his soul.

CHAPTER VII

APPOINTMENT AS VICAIRE[1]

IN the evening Abbé Fleury went down to the Bishop's palace to receive the official notice of his appointment, totally unaware of the disappointment that was in store for him. From Monsignor Müller he could obtain nothing more definite than, 'Go and find Monsieur Farot; he is the one who gives out the deeds of nomination.' Monsieur Farot was a fellow-countryman from Rhône-et-Loire, and by virtue of this common bond he had often shown a sympathetic interest in the young Abbé, who now made his application with a presentiment of coming disaster.

'Well, Monsieur Fleury, so you have come to ask me for your appointment? You have been made Vicaire at El-Cher. Events of the last few days have led to some changes in the nominations that were made a short time ago.'

[1] The Vicaire = what we now call the curate, *i.e.*, the assistant priest. The duplication of benefices in the hands of the powerful and well-born clergy in England was such that in 1831, of the incumbents of 10,560 benefices in England and Wales, only 4,649 were resident in their parishes. In the 5,911 other parishes, there were 3,374 which did not even possess a resident curate. The very fact that the word 'curate' has come in Great Britain to mean, not the man to whom the cure of souls is committed, but a delegate or assistant paid by him to help him in his work, is evidence how far the evil had gone. Our use of the title *Vicar* also tells us of robbery of the Church, namely, of rectorial tithe misappropriated.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

'Thank you, Monsieur le Vicaire-Général; to-morrow I shall set out for El-Cher.'

'I may as well say,' Monsieur Farot added, 'that Monsignor sends you there because of the high opinion he has formed of you. He thinks that, of the four new priests, you are the best able to win the confidence of that parish, and blot out the remembrance of the late sad events that have occurred there.'

'I shall do my utmost to justify that confidence,' the Abbé replied.

'You may depend upon our support in your undertaking. You have friends at the palace who will not lose sight of you at El-Cher.' He then embraced the young man affectionately.

Upon this the Abbé went straight back to Monsignor Müller's, with a chastened joy, to take his leave. 'The Vicaire of El-Cher has come to pay his respects before going away,' he said.

'We shall hope to see you back again soon,' replied Monsignor. 'The Papa'—for thus he used to speak of the Bishop—'will be pleased with your ready compliance. You will not lose anything by being patient. You can count upon me.'

Abbé Fleury did not leave for El-Cher the next day. On the evening of his visit to the episcopal palace, a terrible misfortune threw them all into mourning. A master and two students were carried away by a current, and were drowned in the roadstead below the little hills of Bakou. The Abbé remained for the funeral, which was rendered all the more sad on account of there being no official representative of the palace, as a censure upon the dead Professor's imprudence.

The Abbé spent the eve of his departure for El-Cher with Monsieur Balure, who showed himself more friendly and

affectionate than ever. At the same time he poured advice and warning into the young priest's ears. That he should never do anything without first consulting with his Director, nor read any book doctrinally unsound without permission; that he should make a weekly Confession, and find time daily for the morning meditation, and for the evening rosary, etc.

Next morning the Abbé took his departure without a single soul having ventured to broach the subject of the 'sad occurrences' at El-Cher. He arrived at El-Cher that evening, and was received with great affability by the Curé, Monsieur Chaplié, who for sixteen years had managed with no other assistant than his own brother. The Abbé was his first real Vicaire. The favourite way of welcoming a new-comer to a parsonage is by giving him a good dinner, and in this instance the first meal in honour of the new Vicaire was a most sumptuous repast. Over the dessert the Abbé had to listen while the 'mystery' was detailed for his benefit.

Monsieur Chaplié's brother had been nominated to a curé several months previously, and the Bishop sent a delicate priest from France, who wished to recover his health, as a stopgap at El-Cher, to help in the parish work until such time as a young priest could be ordained.

Throughout the African Diocese of Gréal it is the custom for the Curé and his Vicaire to live together. Now, this Abbé Marlond got leave from the Bishop to have a house of his own, because his sister was with him; and for three months he lived thus at El-Cher, until one day it was discovered that the young woman was no blood relation at all, but a nun whom he had abducted from a religious house in Rome. So much for celibacy!

This abominable affair greatly upset the parish: the disgraced Abbé had had to take the first boat for France, and

the parish was still ringing with the scandal when Abbé Fleury arrived. He is thus brought suddenly face to face with the real facts of life, into immediate contact with the innermost workings of the souls of men. He no longer may live in the midst of an ideal state of things, but where he can watch the human heart at death-grips with the world-spirit of good and evil. Henceforth he must take his part in the struggle, and must, as a priest, lend his aid to others. He will now have practical experience of how the Church, in her position between earth and heaven, exercises her mediatorial office.

In the confessional, by the dying-bed, at the catechizings, and in the pulpit, he, the priest, will have to do the work of the Church. He is in earnest, fervently pious, and devoted; what may he not expect to achieve? . . .

Throughout the whole of the first month after his arrival there was no preaching, because the heat was so great. Such was the custom of the place. Also, as it happened to be the school holiday time, no catechizing classes were being held. So the Abbé had time to look round, and settle down in his new sphere of labour.

His Curé was so jealous of his own influence and authority in the households of the parishioners that he did not desire his assistant to visit. Many Curés treat their Vicaires in this fashion; it is not at all an uncommon thing. Some of them deny themselves on principle the pleasure of social intercourse, and therefore they cannot be expected to put their assistants in the way of it. For the most part, however, the motive is merely one of petty jealousy, but, as this could not possibly be acknowledged, they profess to be actuated by prudence, and so save appearances.

'It would not be safe for you, Monsieur l'Abbé, to visit that family, because there is a grown-up daughter;' or,

'You had better not go to that house; there is a girl there, and you might be compromised.'

In addition to this being a gratuitous insult to a new Vicaire, it does not deceive him in the least, nor conceal from him the really underlying motive:

Abbé Fleury, being a shy man, was neither hurt nor disappointed by this social ostracism. Indeed, he was at first rather glad of it, for long walks were much more to his mind than moving about from one lady's drawing-room to another, to hand teacups and listen to gossip. The Curé, regarding this ready compliance with his wishes as a deferential obedience to his advice, began to bestow upon his Vicaire some signs of favour.

Few Curés can live for many years in one parish without stirring up animosities or wounding susceptibilities. Consequently, if the Vicaire does not associate with the parishioners, no echo of any malicious or bitter speeches can reach his ears, and so the Curé remains on the pedestal where his assistant has placed him. And thus it was for a time with Monsieur Chaplié and the Abbé. The Vicaire did not know his Curé as yet. They were still enjoying their honeymoon.

Before the school holidays came to an end, and before the catechizings could be resumed, the Abbé was given a month's leave of absence. It is impossible to describe his surprise and joy when he read the letter from Monsignor Müller that brought him this good news. Since his ordination to the priesthood, he had greatly longed to visit his old home; and his mother's impatience to see her son again was no less urgent. When he reached home, his mother insisted on kneeling to receive his priestly blessing. So filled was the good woman with simple and living faith, that in the presence of God's priest she heeded not the promptings of motherhood. To her devout mind a priest was

higher than any earthly being. The Abbé lifted her up as quickly as he could, and by his tender embrace and loving words tried to make her feel that her son was still the child of her bosom, the same little Charles whom she loved so dearly.

On the morrow the Abbé Fleury celebrated Mass in the Chapel of the Virgin where, in his fifteenth year, he had been made to swear on the Gospels to be faithful to his vocation. A great number of his friends were present. Nevertheless, he consecrated no more than two wafers—one for himself as celebrant, and one for his mother. At the moment of communion his heart melted with joy, and his eyes were suffused with tears. His hand trembled with emotion as he gave his mother the eucharistic bread. It seemed to him that until this moment his priesthood had not really begun. And what joy can be sweeter to a young priest's heart than that? In that Divine communion of souls filial love is exalted and sanctified, and expands and strengthens as it draws near to the Divine Source of all love. The Abbé was happy indeed, and his mother radiant and proud at the realization of her long-cherished hopes.

On the following Sunday Abbé Fleury, as was the custom, had to intone High Mass for the parish at Loirolles. Poor old Abbé Peyrard was not there to enjoy his triumph, but our Abbé did not forget him when he offered the Communion for the departed. The Curé of the parish assisted the young priest. At this very altar, where for three years he had filled the office of choir-boy, he now, as priest, celebrates the Holy Sacrifice. As he had once knelt, so now others kneel before him, and the remembrance of the sinfulness of his soul in God's sight confuses and oppresses him. But with that humiliating feeling a gentle breeze of gladness sprang up within him. Henceforth he would live

for God, he would preach the Gospel, he would even enjoy peace of heart; and his priestly life should evermore be the glory and honour of his mother.

And she, worthy soul! when she heard her son's voice singing before the altar, in clear tones that trembled slightly with natural emotion, she felt her heart bound with gladness. You must be able thoroughly to understand, and to enter into the condition of mind of, a sincere devotee of the Church of Rome, before you can fully realize the extent of the joy, pride, and bliss, that is expressed when a Roman Catholic mother exclaims: 'My son, my own boy, my very own, is a priest!'

Days spent on leave do not drag like days spent in a seminary; they fly fast. The time for departure came all too soon, and Charles found himself at El-Cher again. And now for the first time the young Vicaire mounted the pulpit steps. His subject was Prayer. Following the bent of his own mind, which was averse from the speculative and the discussion of the unknowable, he wished to make his first sermon distinctly practical. He divided his unpretentious discourse into three heads—the prayer of fear, the prayer of selfishness, the prayer of love. Discomposed a little at first by the sight of so many eyes fastened on him, he quickly pulled himself together. The strangeness of hearing the sound of his own voice reverberating through the silence of the church soon wore off, and he was able to follow the thread of his discourse to its conclusion without hesitation or embarrassment.

The sermon was a success; the Curé was pleased, and at luncheon brought out a bottle of Bordeaux.

The catechizings began on the Monday, and the little boys were allotted to the Abbé, who took up the work with a whole-hearted earnestness. What priestly duty can be more delightful and profitable than that of forming the minds of

the young after the true pattern, and of teaching them the duties of the Christian life? Unwearyingly the Abbé applied himself to the uncongenial task of teaching the very young by continual repetition of the same simple lessons; and by unvarying gentleness and patience he succeeded in riveting their attention, and retaining their interest. Nevertheless, he got very little satisfaction even out of the few bright specimens. They learned to repeat mechanically the whole four parts of the Catechism, both questions and answers; but when he sought to obtain from them a repetition of his careful explanations, he was met by a dead silence. The childish mind is not capable of absorbing abstract ideas; it can seize on nothing outside the limits of the material, and only on what comes within its own narrow experience.

'What do you receive in the Holy Communion?' he asked of one of these poor children. And the child replied, without a moment's hesitation: 'A pretty picture, sir!' The child had already forgotten the proper answer in the remembrance of the little framed picture which it is usual to give to each communicant on the day of his first Communion.

Another answer is even more illustrative: 'Where was Jesus Christ born?'

'On a table at Bethlehem.' It was a minute or two before the Abbé realized that the child had missed the meaning of the word 'stable.'

And here is one of the weak points in the primary teaching of the Roman Catholics: they make so much of the letter of the Catechism, and neglect to give sufficient instruction in its meaning and spirit. Instead of placing the Gospels in the hands of the children, they are made to learn theological formulæ, which are often the only things that leave any traces in their memory. How much better it would be to place these young hearts under the direct

and immediate influence of the words and actions of the Saviour—to show them Jesus healing, Jesus pardoning, Jesus dying, as He is presented in the simple narratives of the New Testament! Such direct application to the Gospel would be a means by which the grace of the Holy Spirit might act upon them, and then the abstract ideas of the Catechism concerning salvation, sin, and grace would become living and comprehensible.[1]

This system could have only one drawback in the eyes of the Roman Church—namely, that in the Gospels the children would not find a single trace of an infallible Pope, or of obligatory confession, etc. And that is the reason why Rome substitutes the Catechism for the Gospel.

Sensitive and sympathetic, Abbé Fleury's heart was often deeply moved by the scenes that he witnessed at the grave's side. When he saw the silent tear or heard the stifled sob, and the cries that mourners, weak from long watching, were unable to restrain, a lump would rise in his throat, and it was only with difficulty that he could master himself sufficiently to keep a calm exterior. And he felt it hard to have to intone the service in Latin before these poor, broken-hearted mourners—in Latin, uncomprehended of the people, who were yearning for one word of loving sympathy. That custom, which was suitable enough for a convent, weighed often upon the Abbé like a heavy burden, when he was taking the Burial Service in the cemetery. He would then have loved to add some comfortable words of truth and hope to those Latin prayers. But to speak at a burial was forbidden by the synodal statutes, under pain of suspension, so he had to put constraint upon himself and to abstain. Nor is that all, for when, on one occasion, he had committed the body of a little child to the ground, and

[1] Translator ventures to add 'and not leave the other undone.'

had not been able to refrain from pressing the hand of the poor afflicted father, it came to the ears of the Curé, who that very evening said to him in a tone of banter: 'Your compassion flows from a kind heart, but I shall be obliged if you will not introduce this strange custom. I think it is a habit in vogue amongst Protestants.' So the Abbé had to give it up, although all the while he considered it a Christian mode of action, and in accord with the Gospel spirit of love. The young Vicaire therefore found the Burial Service a great trial, by reason of the keenness of his human sympathies, and visiting the sick a still greater trial to his priestly sensibilities, especially in the case of the dying. For in this Diocese of Gréal there were many families who never suffered a priest to enter their houses except when someone lay at the point of death, and probably in a state of complete unconsciousness. The Abbé often had to give the last unction to motionless bodies, already stiffening under the icy touch of death. And more than once he had to pronounce a conditional absolution ('if thou art living'), so little sign of life did the sick person give. On those occasions he would say sadly within himself: 'What possible good can the soul glean from that absolution? Did it hear my voice? Was that soul looking to its Saviour?'

Here we see one instance of the logical application of Roman theology. No doubt it is an extreme case. Nevertheless, the theory of penitence, whether its authors like it or not, produces one disastrous result. In all questions of repentance a higher importance is attached to the priest's absolution than to the penitence of the soul. And men are misled to imagine that conversion is but of secondary importance. So that if only the priest shall come at the last moment, make the sign of the cross over the dying, and mumble the words of pardon, the friends are quite

comfortable and happy; the dying man has thereby made his peace with God.

'Why trouble yourself about the matter?' Monsieur Chaplié often said to his Vicaire; 'the Church has arranged it all for us. No responsibility of any kind rests with us.'

But the Abbé kept turning it over in his mind, until at last he began to perceive that this doctrine was at variance with the Gospel.

When Lent came round, the Abbé consented to undertake all the preaching. Three times a week he gave addresses from the pulpit on the subject of social duties. The Curé considered him too modern, and told him so.

'Why leave the beaten track?' he would say. And the Abbé would reply:

'I preach nothing but what is in the Gospels.'

'I know that, but I have accustomed my parishioners to expect generalities and devotional discourses upon worship.'

'That is no doubt what best suits your particular turn of mind,' the Vicaire would return with quiet persistence; 'but either you must allow me to preach from the Sermon on the Mount, or we shall return to the usual custom of preaching turn about.'

The Curé did not like preaching. Thankful that he had an earnest and zealous assistant to take up this burden, he sometimes was gently critical, but he let the Vicaire have his way.

Early in May Abbé Fleury's mother came to spend a few weeks with her son. The Curé, who always made himself agreeable to everybody, gave her a warm welcome. The Abbé paid a small board for her to cover the extra housekeeping expenses, and all went smoothly. The only thing that worried the Curé was that Madame Fleury went every

evening to the convent to spend a few hours with the Sisters. It rarely happens in the parish that the relations between the good Sisters and their Curé are unclouded. To these holy habitations every whisper travels, and the nuns are often the confidantes of the discontented and of the ill-natured. The poor Curé feared that all the old forgotten stories, hoary tales, and worn-out grievances thus brought to her son's ear would dislodge him from his pedestal, and would utterly destroy his influence over his Vicaire.

Several days after his mother's arrival at El-Cher, Abbé Fleury received a diocesan mandate to supply services in two churches in the neighbourhood. The Curé of these two churches had been found dying in his presbytery, the victim of a murderous assault. Public rumour accused the natives, because evil tongues asserted that the Curé was in the habit of lending them small sums of money at exorbitant interest. The charge of these two churches was no sinecure, for the nearer of them was more than nine miles from El-Cher, and the other more than fifteen.

Abbé Fleury started with his mother on Sunday, at four in the morning, for the more distant of the two churches, and as soon as they arrived he went to the Mayor for the key of the church, and at once began to ring the first call to Mass ; then, while his mother bravely set to work to tidy the little church and to dress the altar, he had himself to lay out the ornaments of worship in the vestry.

Half an hour after his arrival he celebrated a Low Mass in the presence of half a score of the faithful. Then, after putting everything away, he stepped again into the conveyance, and made for the other church to say a second Mass.

By the time he had finished it was nearly eleven o'clock. Wearied by the long fast, and shaken by the jolting on the road, he swallowed a cup of wretched coffee in a miserable

inn, and returned to El-Cher in time to preside at vespers.[1]

When the Abbé thought it over, he came to the conclusion that the souls of the faithful could get very little good indeed from his hurried visit, and from that hasty Mass, which to them was but a dead letter; and that it would have been better could he have employed that half-hour in explaining a page of the Gospels in a language they could understand, to teach them how to draw near to God. He could not help feeling that that part of his ministerial work was vain and useless.

It may be said in passing, as an instance of how things are mismanaged, that the Bishop remitted to the young Vicaire two months later the sum of twenty shillings, to defray these expenses, which had amounted to at least four pounds. Nevertheless, he dared not complain. But from another quarter he received a handsome compensation.

Monsignor Müller had not forgotten his promise, and, with good Monsieur Balure to quicken his memory, he had thought of something for his protégé. So one day, towards the end of June, the Abbé received a letter from his Director: 'These are the new appointments . . . As for you, I know that you are going to Gréal. But do not breathe a word to anyone. Wait until it has been officially notified to your Curé.' Three days later Monsieur Chaplié received the notice from the Bishop, and informed the Abbé of his appointment as Vicaire in Gréal Cathedral.

A week afterwards the Abbé was at his new post. His mother, proud and happy, settled him in. Then she left for France, accompanied by Monsieur Balure, who was going to spend his vacation with his own people.

[1] Vespers is said at El-Cher at from 2 to 2.30 p.m.

CHAPTER VIII

PRO-CURÉ

ABBÉ FLEURY had been Vicaire at the cathedral for only a few months, when the Bishop made a further demand on his obedience.

'I am sending you, my dear son, to Zénet as pro-Curé. Do you accept?'

'Without hesitation, Monsignor. Did I not promise you obedience on the day when I was ordained priest?'

'Very good, my son! But in this instance I ask of you more than obedience. I ask for devotedness. You will be single-handed in that important parish, and you will have a great deal to do. As far as that goes, I know you, and have no fears.'

'You may depend upon me, Monsignor.'

'I must furthermore ask you to be very patient with the Curé, Monsieur Randu. He is very ill, and he is in consequence not easy to get on with. In a word,' the Bishop continued, 'I depend upon you entirely, and I should not wish to send you to this arduous post if I could not put implicit trust in you. Go, therefore, my dear Abbé, and my blessing attend you.'

Abbé Fleury had acquiesced indeed, but it was with pain at heart. He was very happy at Gréal, near his friends, and near Monsieur Balure. Monsignor Müller, the Vicaire-

General, gave him every encouragement, and promised him future compensation.

Some days after his arrival at Zénet, he received a letter from Monsignor Müller. It ran thus:

'My dear Friend,

'I am glad to inform you that our Most Eminent and Very Venerable Father has decided that the sum of twelve pounds, which was paid to you from the Secretary's office the day of your departure for Zénet, was not to be regarded as an advance payment, but was a special indemnity, and consequently you will not be required to repay it to the diocesan funds. I will not insult you by even suggesting that you would do well to thank His Eminence for this favour.

'Believe me to remain, my dear son,

'Yours most sincerely in N.S.,[1]

'A. C. Müller.'

As the Bishop had told him, his position at Zénet was no easy one for the young pro-Curé. It was not the work that daunted him, although that was overwhelming. In addition to the heavy burden of ordinary parish duties, the chaplaincy of the hospital and of the penitentiary left him hardly any leisure. However, the trouble did not lie there, but close at hand in the presbytery.

To the poor old Curé, hopelessly bed-ridden with a dreadful cancer, it was a pain and grief no longer to be able to be about the parish, in which he had laboured for more than thirty years. For him, who was activity itself, to be condemned to complete inaction was a trial that reduced him to a state of extraordinary nervous irritability. And at the end of some months, when our Abbé had won the

[1] Our Saviour.

sympathy of all, the poor invalid could not help feeling his position even more. At times he would give vent to such remarks as these :

'I cannot understand why such a novice should be given an authority to hear the confessions of the Sisters, which is usually only accorded to veterans in the priesthood.'

And then, recovering his self-control, he would try to atone for his unkind remarks, and ask the Abbé's forgiveness in words that brought tears to the eye of the young man.

Every week the young pro-Curé sent the Bishop news of Monsieur Randu's illness, but he made no complaints, happen what might.

The Vicaire-General frequently sent him words of encouragement. One of his letters is as follows :

'My dear Monsieur Fleury,

'I renew the powers that I gave you on your departure for Zénet. Poor Monsieur Randu ! The news you have sent does not surprise me. If the distance were not so great, I would come and see him. Give him my kindest regards, and tell him that I often think of him, and especially at the Holy Communion. For the heavy cross that he has to bear, he will certainly merit a great reward. And you too, my very dear friend, will undoubtedly reap a good recompense for the devotion and care you bestow on him. God will not leave unrequited what you have done for him, and for the parish of Zénet.

'Believe me, my very dear friend,

'Yours most affectionately,

'Farot, *Vic.-Gén.*'

The poor Curé began to show the Abbé great affection. Then love engendered trust, so that he who had been

satisfied with making a formal weekly Confession to the young Abbé, at length gave the young priest his entire confidence.

But this became another source of pain for the Abbé. The old priest had read and studied much, and lo! the cancer of doubt, the far greater evil of the two, was entrenching itself, with its retinue of tormentors, in his soul. When once he did let out his secret, he kept back nothing. He told of his misgivings touching the institution of the Church and its authority, and concerning Confession. And as he gave audible expression to his doubts, tears often would be wrung from his eyes.

'I am about to die,' he moaned. 'I am dying, and I have no faith. Oh, wretched man that I am!'

It would be impossible to express in writing the contradictory feelings that surged in the Abbé's breast. He tried to comfort with soothing words; he repeated the lessons that theology had taught him; he passed many a night absorbed in books, searching for the answer that would bring peace, for the argument that would carry conviction. Then the poor sick man would clearly show that the Abbé's argument made but a vicious circle. And little by little, almost unnoticed, a prolific seed took root in the young priest's mind, for he, too, fell sick of the malady he would have cured. The deadly contagion had attacked him also. The malady that had begun to germinate in the soul of the young Abbé was destined to lie dormant for a few years, and then to show itself again. But, happier far than the old priest, Abbé Fleury did not die before he was permitted to gaze open-eyed at the wondrous things of the Gospel.

As soon as the Abbé perceived that death was drawing near he gave up arguing and had recourse to prayer.

'Put all those thoughts aside, and let us humble our-

selves,' he would exclaim. 'Let us simply say, "I believe what the Church believes," and let us pray.'

But many times the sick man broke in upon the monotonous recitation of the rosary, giving free vent to his caustic humour, and exclaiming:

'You know, Abbé, as well as I do, that the best proof of the Divine structure of the Church is that all the Popes, Bishops and priests have not been able to demolish it.'

However, thanks to prayer, peace seemed to fall gradually upon the soul of the old priest. Death drew near, and his sufferings became more intolerable. Day and night Abbé Fleury kept at his post beside the invalid, strengthening his trust in God. One morning the sick man said to him:

'I shall never again see the sun rise. To-day is my last on earth. I have no more pain. This is the end.'

The Abbé made the holy unctions, and the old priest was able to make the responses. Then, very soon afterwards, feeling that he was dying, he asked for the prayers for those about to be released, and also that the Sisters might be sent for to come and pray by his bedside. And the Abbé, holding him by the hand, repeated: 'Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I give you my heart, my soul, and my life. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, grant me to die in peace in your holy companionship,' etc.

The dying man was past speaking. Three times he murmured: 'The Absolution, the Absolution.' The Abbé repeated the formula, and, kneeling down, watched the dying eyes becoming fixed and glassy, and cried out in the words of the liturgy: 'Come forth, Christian soul.' With the final breath the dying man murmured, 'Jesus!'

The Abbé took his right hand, and with it made a last sign of the cross, and then, assisted by the weeping watchers round the bed, he recited the *De Profundis*.[1]

[1] Psalm cxxx.

The agony had lasted almost an hour, and the Abbé was worn out. Nevertheless, he had to make arrangements for the last offices; the body would have to be embalmed; the Bishop and the Curés of the Rural Deanery would have to receive telegrams; forms at the Mayor's office must be filled up, invitations issued, etc.

On the next day but one, Monsieur Farot, the Vicaire-General, arrived from Gréal, to preside at the funeral. A dozen priests came to pay their last respects to the memory of their old friend. Abbé Fleury was chief mourner, and the whole parish followed to the cemetery all that was mortal of the priest who for so many years had been their pastor and father in God.

After the luncheon which followed the funeral, the Vicaire-General took the Abbé aside, and spoke thus:

'I thank you in the name of Monsignor for what you have done for Monsieur Randu, and for this parish. We shall keep it in remembrance. You will remain in charge of Zénet until the nomination of a new incumbent, which will be made without delay.'

Abbé Fleury remained single-handed for two months; then the new Curé came, and the Abbé was placed in a rather delicate position. The parishioners had got into the way of regarding the young pro-Curé as their Curé, and they continued to come to him for Masses and for Confession, and such-like. The Abbé did his best to keep in the background, for he felt that, from the Curé's point of view, he was *de trop* in Zénet. Daily he became more persistent in appeals to Monsieur Balure to use his own influence, and the mediation of Monsignor Müller, to procure for him an appointment as Curé. His mother dreamed of nothing but of the time when she should come and live with her son, and that was the son's ambition also.

Monsieur Balure wrote as follows to Madame Fleury,

with a view to calming the Abbé's unreasonable impatience:

'Dear Madam Fleury,

'It is, of course, no news to you to hear that I am in constant correspondence with the young pro-Curé of Zénet. The dear boy continues to look on me in the light of a father, and makes me the intimate confidant of all his joys and sorrows. But I am led to write now to you because, for some time back, his references to you have been marked by a tone of sadness which has disturbed me somewhat. I fancy that you show him too plainly how impatient you are to go and live with him. Do please be patient, dear, good Madam Fleury. The time will come—indeed, it is not far distant—when your son will assuredly be appointed to a benefice. You and Monsieur Fleury will then be able to go to him together, and nothing will give me greater pleasure than to hear of it. Besides, you have no need to disturb yourselves in the least on your son's account. If he has not yet been appointed to a cure it is because circumstances have not made it possible. There has been a positive need of him in a confidential post by the side of the dying Curé of Zénet, and, as his conduct in the difficult position has been admirable, we only await an opportunity to give him a post that will be a due recompense. You may therefore set your mind at rest. The opportunity will not long be delayed in its coming. I hope that he may get an appointment near Bakou, where you can come and join him, and where I shall often have the pleasure of calling upon you. I pray you, dear Madam Fleury, not to be down-hearted, and not to be impatient. If you would do me a considerable favour, you will write to your son, and counsel him to labour patiently and resignedly in the work which his superiors have confided to him. You

will pardon me, dear madame, for writing to you after this fashion, but you do know me a little. You know how much I love your son, and how greatly I have his welfare at heart. I am sure that both his happiness and yours depends upon a patient waiting for the time when Providence shall choose to bring you together. I am convinced that soon we shall have the pleasure of meeting, and of chatting together as we did on our delightful crossing from Gréal to Marseilles.

'I am, . . .

'Your very humble servant,

'BALURE.'

All this, however, was never to be realized. The life of Abbé Fleury was about to be crossed by a terrible trial (see another letter of Monsieur Balure in Chapter X.).

By the bedside of a sick woman, the Abbé had been brought into contact with a young Spanish girl of whom at first he took no notice. Soon he perceived that the young woman pursued him with marked attentions. In the town he met her at every turn. At church he could not look at the congregation without seeing her two great black eyes fixed on him. It was plain that the poor girl was in love with him. The Abbé wrote to Monsieur Balure, who, in reply, advised the most extreme prudence, and hinted at an impending change of post. The persecution continued. The young priest was as reserved as possible with the young woman, giving no sign that he had noticed what was in her mind. In the meanwhile the Bishop of Gréal died, and all the Abbé's hopes, built upon the influence of Monsignor Müller, the head Vicaire-General, vanished in a moment.

But the other grand Vicaire, Monsieur Farot, was retained in his post, and thus replied to a letter which the Abbé had sent him containing New Year congratulations:

'My dear Monsieur Fleury,

'I am a little tardy in thanking you for your good wishes for a happy New Year, but I think, had you been in my place, you would not have wished me to do otherwise. For some time past we have been in such a turmoil that we have hardly known which way to turn.

'Thanks, then, for your good wishes! I send you mine with all the cordiality you know me to be capable of. Mine is a Rhodane heart, so, my friend, it is the heart of a fellow-countryman who offers them for you to God. Let us hope that they will be realized, and that your desires will be fulfilled. Until then, accept, my dear Monsieur Fleury, the renewed assurance of my affectionate devotion,

'Farot, *V.-G.*'

The new Bishop also seemed well-disposed. He wrote this little note to the Abbé with his own hand:

'My very dear Monsieur Fleury,

'I thank you, with all my heart, for your most friendly letter. I am deeply touched by the sentiments therein expressed towards me. I send you in return my most fatherly blessing, with my warmest prayers and with all my love.

'Antoine, *Bishop of Gréal.*'

So far as the Abbé could see, no cloud had risen above his horizon. He had no warning of the tempest of trial that was so soon to sweep down upon him.

The young Spaniard, seeing that her advances met with no response, sought by every means in her power to compromise him. She once actually thrust herself into the parsonage on the pretext of ordering a Mass.[1] But when

[1] To be said with some special intention, for which a fee would have to be paid.

she saw that all her schemes came to nothing, she resolved to try a bolder stroke.

It was the Abbé's custom to go out in the afternoon to say his breviary, and he generally found his way to the public garden, which on week-days in Zénet was quite deserted. One day as he was saying his prayers, seated in the shade of a group of mastic-trees, he suddenly became aware that the girl was by his side, without his having either seen or heard her approach. The Abbé rose at once to go, but she seized him by the arm and snatched away his hood, saying: 'At last you shall hear me, if you wish to avoid a dreadful scandal.' The Abbé tried to reason with her, but it was mere waste of time. By a rapid movement he regained possession of his hood, and was just making off, when all of a sudden two or three young people belonging to Zénet came in sight. Seeing a young woman alone with the Abbé in this secluded grove, they instantly placed the worst possible construction on the incident, and began at once to overwhelm him with mockery and insult.

The Abbé thought that the shortest way of ending the painful scene would be to make straight for the parsonage as quickly as possible, being anxious also to tell the Curé what had happened, and to an put immediate stop to the spread of calumny. But, alas! his flight was too impetuous, because that was brought forward as damnatory evidence against him. Calumny is not so easily stayed. The young people made the most of the incident, and each tried to surpass the other in invention. The young woman denied nothing and affirmed nothing. Delighted to be the heroine of a romance, and thinking that by this means she might bring the Abbé to her feet, she encouraged the wicked tongues to wag. Before nightfall the little town was in a ferment.

The Curé counselled the Abbé to go away for a few days

—most mistaken advice—and the next day the Abbé made up his mind to go to Bakou and consult Monsieur Balure.

Monsieur Balure was not at all pleased with him for leaving Zénet. 'The Curé gave you wrong advice,' he said. 'Strong in the knowledge of your own integrity, you should have remained at your post. By leaving so quickly, your departure has assumed the character of a flight; but now that you are here, you had better go and report yourself to Monsignor, and tell him plainly all that has befallen.'

The Abbé was received with very great kindness by the Bishop, who also was of opinion that the Curé had advised him badly.

'I will talk the matter over with Monsieur Farot; come and see me again.'

About an hour later, when the Abbé had returned, the Bishop said: 'Now, my dear Abbé, this is what we have decided to do. We cannot believe that you are to blame; nevertheless, it is our duty to inquire into what has occurred. In order to prevent the people of Zénet from passing an unfavourable judgment upon your sudden disappearance, I allow you a month's leave of absence. You will go and see your mother, who is not well. Everybody shall hear that you left Zénet to go over to France. Go, then, my son; things will quiet down while you are away.' So Abbé Fleury started for Marseilles, and in the course of a few days arrived at Loirolles.

But misfortunes do not come singly. The Abbé found his mother lying seriously ill, of the sickness that was to carry her off in a few months. Notwithstanding, at the end of the four weeks of furlough, he received a command from the Bishop to return to Gréal. 'Nothing had been proved against Abbé Fleury. However, to continue under the circumstances to minister at Zénet must necessarily be

somewhat painful. Since he wished to have a parish, a parish he should have.'

The next day Abbé Fleury received his official title to the Curé of Béni-Rahr. 'Go, my son,' said the Bishop. 'I appeal to the uttermost limits to your good-will and devotion. I am sending you to Béni-Rahr to construct a parish; I rely on your powers of organization. After you have been there for a time, come and tell me how your work progresses.'

CHAPTER IX

CURÉ

THE new Bishop of Gréal had from the very beginning of his rule made it known that it was his fixed intention to carve out new parishes in his diocese. He was a true pastor, and had seen with sorrow how many members of the Church had no shepherd ; so he exerted himself at once to found parishes in centres of secondary importance, in which no priest had hitherto resided in charge. For this purpose he called upon many young priests of the age of Abbé Fleury, not all of whom were willing to accede. What would their fellows think and say? Would they not regard the appointment to such a post as a disciplinary punishment? Several young priests therefore chose rather to leave the diocese and go back to France.

Our Abbé, careless as to what anyone might say, soon cast aside the hopes that he had entertained of a pleasant and well-appointed benefice, as the prospect of work in a mission parish appealed to his natural activity and energy. And when Monsieur Balure, kind as ever, would have condoled with him, he was quite honest and sincere in replying: 'But I am very glad of this appointment. If I had been given an easy parish, it would have awakened

jealousies. As it is, no one will envy me, as some did when I was made pro-Curé of Zénet.

The arrival at Béni-Rahr was full of incident. It was not until he had been shaken and bumped through more than thirty miles of that beautiful coast scenery that he arrived at Béni-Rahr, and could climb down from the public coach.

'Where is the church?' was the first question he asked.

'There is not any, sir.'

'Where is the parsonage?'

They stared vacantly, and said, 'What is a parsonage?'

'Why, it is the Curé's house.'

'There is not any, sir.'

'Tell me, then, where does the Mayor of Béni-Rahr live?'

'There is not any, sir.'

At this the Abbé burst out laughing. The situation was becoming altogether too ridiculous. They gave him to understand that this important centre was not a fully established commune, and that the mayoral functions were performed by a deputy.

'Where does the deputy live?'

'There, a few steps down the road. The grocer it is who exercises these functions, and who has secured this nice little addition to his income.'

The Abbé thanked them and made for the grocery. Introducing himself to the deputy, he said: 'I am your new Curé; here is my deed of nomination.'

'What! a Curé at Béni-Rahr! But, sir, we do not need a Curé. We have got on very well until now without one, and we can very well go on as we are. Now, if a doctor or a druggist would but come here, that would be something like!'

'Yet, sir, like a soldier, I must obey orders. My chief

said to me, "Go there," and I had no choice but to come.'

'I quite understand, Monsieur le Curé, and I bid you a hearty welcome, all the same. Besides, I like your looks. You seem honest and straightforward. If you think well, we will take a turn round your new parish, and you will soon get to know the country.'

The Abbé gladly accepted the offer. It would have a good effect upon the population for him to make his first appearance among them by the side of the chief civil authority of the place.

The situation of Béni-Rahr was truly enchanting. The little village, with its little and new houses, all so neat and tidy, spread itself out along the strand, with a coquettishly self-satisfied air. Behind it rose a wooded hill down which a stream plunged, forming a cascade of considerable power. The rivulet then ran merrily in channels along each street, creating an impression of refreshing coolness in the torrid atmosphere of a hot summer noon. As he was walking along, the Abbé began to make plans for the future. On this rising ground he would build the church. His parsonage should nestle cosily amongst this clump of pines. It was all very well to make plans for the future, but he had to supply his immediate needs, and to make provisional arrangements at once.

One large house stood empty. It was divided into two sections by a long passage down the middle. On the right were two rooms that might serve the Curé as dwelling-rooms; on the left two rooms which, when thrown into one, would serve as a waiting-room for the parishioners, and also as a chapel. This would have an exit opening directly on the street by making a door of the French window, and a large cross should be painted on the wall outside, immediately above the door. And while the workmen made these

necessary alterations, the Abbé went round to all the religious communities in Gréal, begging gifts and donations for his parish. By the end of the week Abbé Fleury brought to Béni-Rahr all his spoils, and on Sunday he was able to celebrate Mass for the first time.

As yet there was no altar. He placed the sacrificial slab on a long table, covered it with a linen cloth, added a crucifix and the two regulation wax candles, thus fulfilling the essential liturgical requirements.

On the previous evening he had made the round of the village, inviting all the families to the Mass and sermon of the morrow, saying gently, and with his kindly smile:

'I cannot yet ask you to sit down, so I shall preach only for ten minutes, but you can bring your own seats if you like.'[1] In the evening, when school was over, the teacher lent him some forms for the children, and next day the little room was crowded to overflowing. Some people came out of pity, more out of curiosity, all from sympathy with a young Curé who had worked so hard, and taken so much trouble. Like a good pastor, he spoke to them of their religious duties in language simple, sincere, and earnest, which won all hearts. After the ceremony the Abbé received congratulations and felicitations, which were both an encourgement, and a stimulant to further effort.

During the following week the Curé once more made the round of the surrounding country, and his labour was well repaid. The Abbé of La Trappe, deeply moved by the religious destitution of the new parish, freely gave all the furniture of his private chapel: a wooden altar, a confessional box, several benches, and a little set of the Stations of the Cross. Henceforth Abbé Fleury was rich.

[1] For the rest of the service they would be on their *knees*, and would not require a seat.

His provisional chapel assumed the appearance of a church. He set all these things in their places with pious and loving care. On the Saturday he went round the village gardens, and the colonists, much delighted, took a pleasure in giving him armfuls of flowers, so that on Sunday his altar was decorated with profusion, a real feast of form and colour.

One important thing, however, was still lacking, namely, a bell, to summon the faithful and to proclaim the consecration of the Host. With a little hand-bell he used himself to go up and down the streets of Béni-Rahr half an hour before service. Nobody ventured to smile, not even the people seated at the little tables outside the café. They all appreciated the young priest's earnestness.

On Sunday evenings he began to gather together the children, and some willing helpers, to teach them to sing the vespers and the popular and easy canticles. Everybody helped with goodwill, everything went on swimmingly, and Abbé Fleury looked forward to the happy time when he should be able to write to his parents to come and join him.

Unhappily, wickedness was still abroad. It was soon to assault the Curé of Béni-Rahr anew. When several weeks had gone by, Abbé Fleury, in accordance with the instructions he had received on the day of his appointment to the parish, returned to Gréal. He presented himself before the Bishop, to tell him the result of his work of organization at Béni-Rahr. Monsignor showed every sign of gratification, warmly congratulated the Abbé, and said to him :

'My dear Curé, the highest mark of my approval that I can give you is to promise that I will soon come myself, and by my prayers and blessings consecrate the auspicious beginnings of your new parish.'

The Abbé could have wished for nothing better. Making good use of his visit to Gréal, he went up to the Bakou

Seminary, in order to spend one or two days with his great friend Monsieur Balure. These were happy hours, like hours spent in an oasis on a journey across the desert. The good Director poured words of encouragement and of comfort into his ears. The Abbé confided to him his future plans for the parish, and received most valuable practical advice. 'Do not be in too great a hurry to bring your parents out to Béni-Rahr. Wait until Monsignor has paid you his promised visit. When he sees how poorly you are lodged, he will doubtless give you the means of obtaining a more commodious and more comfortable house.'

This was good advice. The young Curé went back to Béni-Rahr, and threw himself with more ardour than ever into his parochial work. He made an effort to gather the children together every Wednesday as well as on Sundays, so as to have meetings more frequently in the little church. Recognising the good of house-to-house visitation, he multiplied his visits, making himself better known to his flock, and winning his way daily farther into their confidence.

It soon seemed to the people of Béni-Rahr that their little colonial settlement had become more important, and more worthy of notice, since they had their church and their curate. And, strange as it may appear, although Abbé Fleury was met by a good deal of indifference from some families, he met with no hostility. However, had he been superstitious, and had he believed in omens, he would have felt uneasy.

One evening, while he was having supper in his little garden, a snake and a nest of swallows fell from the eaves of the house upon the table. Next morning he found another snake inside the very altar of his church, and on the third day a great adder under his bed, in one of his shoes. The Abbé laughed heartily at these mishaps; but, alas! his laughter was shortly to be changed to weeping.

The young Spaniard, who had compromised Abbé Fleury a few months before, had left Zénet. Hearing of the Abbé's appointment to Béni-Rahr, she vowed in her heart either to bring him to her feet, or to play havoc with his peace. She therefore boldly proclaimed her fixed purpose to thrust herself upon him wherever he might be. Warned by Monsieur Balure, the Abbé was on thorns. Ah, if he had only received a different education in the seminary! If he had only been duly prepared for the difficulties of daily life, he would have taken a bolder course. He would have gone straight to the public attorney, and have lodged a complaint in due form against his persecutor. And there can be no doubt that the fear of the police would have checked the hysterical mad woman. But the priest is so brought up that he has an unwholesome horror of publicity. To remain in the shade, to live his life unnoticed, is his dream, so the Abbé never once thought of directing public attention to such a delicate matter.

In face of that devilish persecution his courage ebbed away. Little by little he became timid. He began to take a dislike to this parochial ministry, in which so little real good could be done, and in which he met with such obstacles as these. Still he remained at his post, trying to forget it all by unsparing work, while he waited for events to shape themselves. Would that he had anticipated those events by vigorous action! For the girl, seeing that he paid no attention to her threats, had the audacity to write to the Bishop that she wanted the Abbé as her husband, and that she would not sound a truce until he had consented to marry her. 'If Monsieur the Abbé Fleury will not accept,' so the letter ran, 'but remains at his post, I will go to Béni-Rahr, and create such a scandal that he will be obliged to quit.'

You can judge of the Bishop's dismay. He, too, ought

to have set the law in motion. But, like the Abbé, he preferred the silent method, thinking it to be more prudent. He made the Abbé come to Gréal, and, with many expressions of commiseration, told him what was on foot against his peace. The Abbé left the Bishop puzzled and distressed. Monsieur Balure awaited him. Together they went down to the roadstead where the fleet was at anchor.

'Remain quietly at your post,' Monsieur Balure kept saying. 'Take courage. This frightful female will no doubt grow tired of following you.'

'No; I have quite lost heart,' the Abbé replied sadly. 'Why should I stay in my parish to be the subject of a fresh scandal?'

'But these are only threats, my dear friend. There is a vast gulf between a threat and its execution.'

'Possibly; but supposing that it should happen before my mother's eyes! The pain of it would kill her.' Stretching out his hand towards the ships of the fleet, he continued drearily: 'Those who live out there are happy; they have no woman on board to disturb them.'

Monsieur Balure smiled, but the Abbé, following up his thought, went on: 'I shall go and ask Monsignor to authorize me to apply for a post as a chaplain in the navy. There, at any rate, I shall live in tranquillity with persons of intelligence, without having to fear a woman's frenzied persecution.' And notwithstanding that Monsieur Balure brought forward reason after reason, and argument after argument, to turn him from his project, the Abbé held doggedly to a notion which seemed to offer him a good hope of deliverance. He gave no heed to anything, but adhered to his resolution, and next day informed the Bishop of the idea.

'We will consider it. Come and see me again this evening,' the Bishop said.

In the afternoon the Bishop gave his approval to the Abbé's proposal. It would certainly relieve the authorities of an annoyance.

'I give you my permission,' he said; 'but you will have to remain subject to my jurisdiction as a priest of the Gréal Diocese. If you should wish to return, you will always have a place in our midst. Here is the letter that must accompany your application.'

It ran as follows:

'YOUR EXCELLENCY,

'The Abbé Fleury, a priest of the Diocese of Gréal, has been authorized by me to make application to you for a chaplaincy in the navy. I hereby formally endorse my verbal authorization, and I take the liberty to recommend the application made by Monsieur Fleury to your Exellency's favourable consideration.

'I have the honour to remain, dear and honoured sir,

'Yours faithfully,

'ANTOINE, *Bishop of Gréal.*'

'Return to Béni-Rahr,' the Bishop continued, addressing the Abbé. 'I am about to name your successor. Come and see me again before you go away, for I shall wish to give you my blessing.'

Several days later the Abbé informed his beloved parishioners of his approaching departure, and the many expressions of regret showed how high a place he had won in their estimation.

'If you go,' they said, 'we do not want another Curé.'

The Abbé looked upon this as simply a way of speaking, but he learned afterwards that his successor had been very badly received. None of the three priests sent in turn by the Bishop could stay in the place, and Monsignor then left it unprovided.

Even to-day the parish of Béni-Rahr is still without a priest. Who knows but that, perhaps, one day she may receive Abbé Fleury as her minister and pastor, but not of the Roman obedience?

The day of his departure was a day of sadness for the Abbé, and for Monsieur Balure. In the morning Monsignor had received the future naval chaplain with marked kindness. He had himself gone with him to the Diocesan Registry to sign the papers that a priest requires before he can live outside his canonical diocese. Then he had blessed and embraced him with fatherly effusion, adding an *au revoir* to his farewell.

The boat left at mid-day. Monsieur Balure went down with him, wishing to be with his poor friend to the last moment. Both their hearts were very sad.

'You will go on writing to me once a fortnight, as you have never failed to do since the day of your ordination. Do not forget that I am always your best friend. Whatever happens, remember that I am wholly devoted to your interests. Of all the collegians that I have directed in the last fifteen years, you are the dearest to me . . . and you are going to leave me! Go, and may God have you in His keeping.'

Then they said good-bye. The Abbé's eyes were full of tears, and the old Director turned sorrowfully away. This was the parting of two hearts whose friendship had been cemented by mutual love of God.

Several years later Providence was to bring them together again, but only to add fresh pangs to their friendship. For the next meeting was to result in a final severance, after tragic moral wrestlings whose issue put an end to all friendly intercourse, although it could not efface the remembrance of a love that once had been. When this final separation came, the Abbé then left, not the Gréal Diocese

merely, but the Roman Church. Between now and then his inner self was destined to unfold, and he was no longer to be content with the truth as he had been wont to see it, broken up and polarized by the prism of friendship. His own judgment was to assert itself, and lead him to decide his life for himself, under the eye of God. Armed with the invincible Gospel, he was one day to be permitted to burst the bonds of ignorance and of credulity, to renounce the artificial state of existence of the priest, and to live the normal human life. He should then rise from the sacerdotalism of Rome to the higher freedom of a truly primitive and Catholic Christianity.

CHAPTER X

PRIVATE TUTOR

HAVING sent in his application to the Chief of the Admiralty, our Abbé returned to France, and after resting for a few days at Loirolles he went in person to Paris to make himself known at headquarters. He endeavoured to work the oracle by means of the kindly offices of two highly placed service officers whom he knew, and who were interesting themselves keenly on his behalf—a Vice-Admiral and a General of Division.

The Admiralty Board gave him good hopes, but told him he would have to wait. But as he found, on inquiry, that there could be no vacancy for a chaplain before a year was up, unless by some accident, the Abbé decided to wait, and to keep his name on the list. Then he returned to Loirolles.

Not many days after, the Provincial of the Josephists, learning that the Abbé was free, made him an offer of a professorship in the College of Sainoise. The offer, however, came too late, as the Abbé had meanwhile been applied to by a family that wanted a tutor for a young boy, and he had already engaged himself to them. The knowledge that he would be a member of a pious and religious household not far distant from Loirolles had great attrac-

tions. He would often be able to go and visit his mother, who now was a confirmed invalid, and comfort her by his presence. The Abbé felt he had done wisely in accepting this tutorship, and the prospect pleased him. His pupil, a boy of fourteen, soon became attached to him, and worked well, making marked progress. More fortunate than many a tutor, the Abbé had entire control of the boy's course of study, and, to secure the regularity so important in education, he, with the parents' unreserved approval, made it a rule that the boy should never be taken away from his work, except for some very good reason.

On one day the subjects were to be French or English; on another, Latin or Greek. Stated hours were arranged for preparation and other duties, for class, and for recreation. The Abbé also so arranged the order of the various subjects and the kinds of work, that his pupil was not overstrained, and the boy began to be interested in the books that he had formerly held in aversion.

Every evening the boy took to his mother the summary of what he had done, and every Saturday evening his grandmother was keen to hear the result of the week's work.

In short, everybody was satisfied and content. But Abbé Fleury did not forget that there was canvassing to be done for his prospective chaplaincy. He had been told how important it was to have good recommendations, and he did not shrink from writing to ask Monsignor Antoine, the Bishop of Gréal, to obtain one for him from an influential personage.

The Bishop sent this kindly-expressed reply:

'My dear Monsieur Fleury,

'I herewith send you what you ask for, with great pleasure. As Monsieur Farot has already told you from

me, I shall be happy to do all I possibly can to secure the successful issue of your application to the Admiralty.

'Believe me, my dear Monsieur Fleury,

'Yours most affectionately,

'ANTOINE, *B. of Gréal.*'

Nor did the Abbé forget his beloved parish of Béni-Rahr. He so interested a rich lady of Rhodane in his work of inception that she presented quite a quantity of ecclesiastical furnishings to the new parish.

The Abbé having notified Monsieur Farot, the Arch-Vicar, of the despatch of this gift, he received from him this cordial acknowledgment:

'MY DEAR MONSIEUR FLEURY,

'Yours of July was delivered after I had started for France. I felt that I must come and breathe my native air if I were to recover from a somewhat severe indisposition. I am now at Vichy, and shall be here for several days longer. I am very much obliged to you for what you have done for the church of Béni-Rahr. In your postscript you tell me to acknowledge the receipt to Mrs. T. de M. at Rhodane, but I hardly think the address you have given me will be sufficient.

'With many thanks, my dear Monsieur Fleury,

'Believe me,

'Yours most sincerely,

'FAROT.'

Abbé Fleury thus kept on excellent terms with his canonical superiors.

As his tutorial duties left him considerable leisure, he sought to occupy it usefully. By the advice of Monsieur Balure, with whom he corresponded frequently, he determined again to take up the subjects he had studied in

the seminaries ; and he began with theology With thoughtfulness and care he slowly re-examined the stock subjects he had studied at Bakou, but the arguments appeared no more convincing than before, and the old objections obtruded on his mind as forcibly as ever. He asked the Curé of the parish for the loan of a more advanced treatise on theology, but only to find that it contained a greater accumulation of subtleties and of cleverer subterfuges, but rarely a plain answer, or a distinct and decisive proof. He did not know what to think. The Curé advised him not to think at all, and to let things alone. We may say, in passing, that this Curé had been a Jesuit. So the Abbé laid aside his theological books, baffled, and willingly shut his eyes, for he still felt the power and the influence of phrases, and the word 'heresy' still made him shudder. He was not yet ripe for the logical conclusion, because his mind and his religious feelings were still wholly Romish. He said many prayers, but he did not pray. It never entered his mind to read the Gospel message in its own beautiful simplicity.

There is indeed but one only means of knowing God and His will, and that is to go to Him by Jesus Christ. Our Abbé thought to see by the light of human intelligence, and in mysticism he found no more than disordered overflowings of feeling, and in theological deductions no more than hypotheses of the imagination. He made the great mistake of searching for absolute truth in writings based on *a priori* assumptions. So nothing brought him any satisfaction. He tried to persuade himself that his uneasiness had been caused by reading the masterpieces of literature in which he had so delighted.

His young pupil was to enter the Jesuit College after the holidays, so the Abbé, who was still waiting for a chaplaincy in the navy, obtained a new appointment as private tutor

with another family, thanks to the recommendation of the Sainoise Superior. The father of his new pupil bore a celebrated name, the grandfather having made it illustrious by his polemical writings. He had been a fervid defender of the form of theocracy upheld by the Church, and had reared a magnificent pediment for the pretensions of Papal government. His books are to be found in every presbytery, and are treated as classics by the Roman Church. The Pope decorated his brilliant, impetuous, and devoted defender, and, what was much more, gave him and his descendants the privilege, of which our Abbé took the fullest advantage, of having a private chapel. Wheresoever the author or his sons may choose to take up an abode, they have the right to rear an altar in their own house for the celebration of the Mass, a privilege confined as a rule to the episcopate. There was therefore no need for the Abbé to turn out every morning and go to the parish church. At a quarter-past seven he rang a little bell in the vestibule, and at half-past seven he celebrated.

On Sundays the whole household was present at the Sacrifice, in the fulfilment of the duties of the Lord's Day, but on weekdays the Abbé had often only the master of the house, who took a pride and glory in performing the humble office of server. Thanks to the privilege, it was not necessary to be present at the parish celebrations except at Easter. But at the same time it must be owned that, thanks also to the Papal privilege, this family, not being required to attend the parish church, never heard the Word of God preached, so that, even in the opinion of the Church of Rome, this domestic chapel privilege seems to be beneficial only to the sick.

The Abbé could not help thinking in this connection of Abbé Randu, the poor Curé of Zénet, prone on his couch of suffering, who, after a life given to the Church, had not

been able to obtain permission from the Bishop of Gréal to have Mass said in his sick-room. So little does Rome trouble herself about the obscure soldiers who fight her battles.

As tutor the Abbé was not so happily placed as he had been in his former post. Although the master of the house was a sensible man, he was entirely ruled by his wife. This lady, who was overbearing and arrogant, and excessively proud of her noble birth, expected to have a voice in all things. Accordingly, she at once evinced a disposition to assist in the regulation of her son's studies, and the Abbé, desirous of forestalling any interference in his department, thought the wisest plan would be to meet the lady halfway, and come to some arrangement.

'If you think well, madam, might we not draw up a few rules together? If you will be good enough to settle what are to be the hours of study, it will be both my duty and my pleasure to enforce a strict adherence to them.'

This deference to her judgment pleased the lady, and she drew up a workable scheme; but to tie herself down for good and all to any plan was altogether too much to expect. One day the pupil would be carried off to make a call, or his work would be interrupted by a summons to come down to the drawing-room. Another time his mother would insist that her son was ill, although he might declare positively that there was nothing the matter with him. And that kind of thing was incessant, until the Abbé, although he would much have liked to keep to the rules laid down, saw the uselessness of being more royalist than the King, so he let the capricious lady have her way.

This year another crushing blow fell upon Abbé Fleury. His dear little mother died. For some time past the good woman's health had no doubt been in a precarious state, but there had been nothing to give warning that such a

sudden dissolution was imminent. Consequently, the unexpectedness of it made the shock, to one of the Abbé's sensitive nature, all the more terrible. He was so devoted to his mother. A time came, however, when the Abbé saw in this timely affliction the merciful hand of God. This was when he left the Church of Rome. Had his mother been alive, would he have had the courage to take such a step? And even had he, prompted by his conscience, been able to set all other considerations at naught, and had he freed himself from that preposterous bondage, would he not thereby have broken her heart and shortened her life?

The life of a clerical tutor in a private family is certainly as little clerical as can be imagined, for the tutor-priest lives outside of the sacristy, and far from its petty intrigues. By force of circumstances, and from the fact of his living in the world, he has no other dealings with the parish clergy than those necessitated by the claims of neighbourly civility. He has not to see people about marriages, still less about burials. As a general rule he has nothing at all to do with the parish; therefore he may neither officiate by a sick-bed, nor take his seat in the confessional. What, then, were the ecclesiastical duties that were still incumbent on Abbé Fleury? Only one obligation, namely, that of spending one hour a day in the reading of his breviary. Only one prerogative remained to him, namely, that of celebrating the Mass every day, if he should see fit, by virtue of his *célébret* license. The life of the clerical tutor is really as little ecclesiastical, therefore, as it could be. On the other hand, although he is far removed from the life of the sacristy, he is not condemned to solitude; also the education of his pupils leaves him leisure to engage in the pleasures of reading and of conversation. As to reading, the books allowed in a seminary, and those which are to be

found in presbyteries, have been subjected to very jealous scrutiny. The mind that seeks its pasture within these narrow limits will not crop a great variety of mental diet. In the library of a château, more especially where the owner likes to be considered a man of some learning, the tutor will find a most varied collection of books. Here are to be gathered new ideas that fructify most prolifically in a virgin soil. The mind which absorbs them expands and bursts its shell, and the awakening desire to see and know starts headlong on its career.

As for conversation, this also proved of great value to the Abbé. Amongst those who visited at the château were men of marked intellectual power. But it was from the naval officers especially, whose accurate and straightforward tone of mind impressed him greatly, that he chiefly gained food for reflection. And these ideas, casually dropped in the course of conversation, set him off on many a train of thought. Little by little, and without his being aware of it, the huge and flimsy fabric of Romish beliefs crumbled away. But it was not at the first a sudden and total collapse: it was merely a partial dismantlement. Bit by bit the stones fell out, until little would soon be left to hold together what remained, but the cement of the love and friendship of an old Director, which very shortly would prove unequal to the strain. For the ideas which the Abbé imbibed from conversation and reading were pregnant with the germs of pure truth and Christian liberty, which must one day spring forth and bear the fruit inherent in them.

Educated in seminaries, forbidden to associate in the holidays with anyone outside a narrow clique, condemned to solitude behind the presbytery wells, Abbé Fleury's mind still contained false and defective ideas concerning the ordinary life of man. How, indeed, could it have been

otherwise? It was not until he became a tutor in a private family that it was borne in upon him by irresistible evidence that the priest's whole existence has to be passed on the margin of society; and he was forced to acknowledge that family ties can add much to the joy of living. As private tutor the good and beautiful side of family life was revealed to him, and he saw how in the self-absorbed life of the celibate true manhood becomes atrophied; and how, on the other hand, a father's sense of responsibility develops individual energy and personal initiative.

The Abbé's first aspirations towards liberty date from this period. He was, however, still expectantly waiting for his naval chaplaincy, and he was advised to go to Paris and see the official at the Admiralty responsible for making appointments. He followed this advice and took the journey, for thus at least he would get to know how his candidature stood. He was assured that his name was high up on the list, but he was likewise told that it had been decided by the Board for the Regulation of Public Worship that no more chaplaincies would be given, except to priests who were actively engaged in parish work. 'If you are not desirous to return to Gréal just yet, find a Bishop,' they said, 'who will give you a title, and an appointment in his diocese, and your success will be assured.'

Abbé Fleury being as keenly desirous as ever to obtain a naval chaplaincy, made up his mind to do all that was likely to secure the end in view, and he at once acquainted Monsieur Balure with his desire to obtain an appointment in France while he awaited his nomination. The old Director had never looked favourably on the tutorships, because his experienced eye had marked the great danger to which such a life exposed the observant and inquiring mind of the best-loved of his spiritual sons; so he wasted

no time now. Besides, he understood that, should the Abbé fail in obtaining an appointment as a navy chaplain, he would prefer to return to the active life of parochial ministry.

The Abbé had passed the preceding winter at Montverdun, and, through an introduction from Monsieur Balure, had made the acquaintance of the Curé of Saint-Louis, who invited him to preach and officiate on several great occasions. To him then the Abbé applied, and several days later Monsieur Balure came to his assistance with the following letter to the Curé of Saint-Louis :

My very dear Sir,

'Monsieur Fleury on his return from Montverdun acquainted me with the fact, that he had asked you to do him the favour of engaging him as Vicaire until he should receive his appointment as naval chaplain. You already know how interested I am in this young priest. I need not, therefore, enlarge on that point. Far less need I say how pleased I should be to see him quit his present post and resume parish work. But just because I know that, if you decide to do something for him, it will be for my sake, and to do me a kindness, I cannot allow you to be in ignorance of the reasons which made this young priest throw up his work in the Gréal Diocese.

'It was not solely from love of the navy that Monsieur Fleury left the diocese. When he determined to apply for a naval chaplaincy, he was most anxious to escape the importunity of a wretched female, who sought to compromise both him and his priestly honour. After a vicariat at the cathedral to which he had been appointed when he had been a priest for barely a year, he was sent to Zénet as pro-Curé, during the serious illness of the Curé of that parish. There it was that he had the misfortune to

come in contact with the one who has been responsible for all the unpleasantnesses he has had to endure.

'He had been at Zénet for quite seventeen months, and had won the good opinion of everyone, when he perceived this creature's infatuation. She pursued him everywhere; to church, to private houses where he went to visit the sick, in the street, and out into the country. She found means of treading on his skirts at all times, and often actually of addressing him. She even tried to force herself into the presbytery on the pretext of bringing orders for Masses.

'Monsieur Fleury notified me of his fears regarding this girl, and begged me to bring every pressure to bear on the Archbishop to remove him to another parish. Unhappily, I took no steps in the matter, because I had learned from the Diocesan Administration that he was very soon to be given a change, so I did no more than merely advise him to be patient and prudent. This delay was fatal, for the wretched woman, seeing that she was no nearer her point, suddenly made an effort to compromise him publicly. One day she laid wait for him in a public park near the city gates, and, in the presence of some young people apt at scandal-mongering, she pretended to have met the Abbé by appointment. She drew near him unperceived, and the young people say that they saw him talking with her on terms of intimacy. To have held converse with a woman in open day in a public place would have been the only crime of which he could have been found guilty. Even his accusers admit as much. He himself, indeed, distinctly denied that he had held any communication with her at all. But he made the mistake of losing his head and of returning in too great haste to the town.

'Monsieur Fleury, much disturbed and abashed, left Zénet three days later, in order to come and see me at the

seminary, and get my advice. I advised him to go at once to the Bishop and tell him all about it, and request to be removed. But as soon as the wretched girl heard that Monsieur Fleury had left, she also quitted Zénet the very next morning, saying that she intended to track him to Gréal. The affair made much stir in Zénet, and Monsignor Antoine, not knowing exactly what to do about it, advised Monsieur Fleury to take a month's holiday, and go off to France and see his family, hoping that in the interval the truth of the matter would become known, and things settle quietly down. Monsieur Fleury accordingly went home, and in a month's time he returned, by permission of Monsignor Antoine, to Gréal. Monsignor then appointed him Curé of Beni-Rahr, a newly formed parish, where the poor Curé succeeded, at the expense of much zealous labour, in inaugurating church services in a building that he procured, furnished, and decorated for the purpose.

'He had only been there a short time, when the miserable creature heard of his return to the diocese, and began to spread a report that she meant to follow him whithersoever he might be sent. And then it was that poor Monsieur Fleury, disheartened by that infernal persecution, sought leave to quit the diocese for a time. A squadron happening to be anchored off Gréal, he conceived the idea of serving in the navy as a chaplain for a few years, and begged Monsignor to be so kind as to support his application. Monsignor was, I think, quite relieved by this solution of the problem, and recommended him warmly to the Admiralty.

'More than two years have gone by since that time. You know that Monsieur Fleury spent one of these years near you at Montverdun, and that since then he has been at Mataris, as tutor in the family of the Count de ——. His nomination to the naval chaplaincy has not yet been made,

and while awaiting it he would be glad to find employment in parochial work. You know the rest, because he has himself expressed his desire to work under you. I may add that, should he be unsuccessful in obtaining a naval chaplaincy, Monsieur Fleury will be glad to make application to be transferred from the Gréal Diocese to that of Montverdun.

'So there, my very dear sir, is the story of Monsieur Fleury. You know him slightly. He is a zealous and intelligent young priest who in my opinion would, under the wise guidance of a good Curé, do a great deal of good and be of great service to the diocese. Although this is quite a private letter, intended to be confidential, you may, of course, show it to Monsignor of Montverdun, should you think it advisable.

'Believe me,

'Yours in the Lord,

'Very faithfully and obediently,

'BALURE.'

The Curé of Saint-Louis forwarded that long letter at once to the Bishop of Montverdun, who caused an inquiry to be made in the Diocese of Gréal. Monsignor Antoine gave letters dimissory, which set Abbé Fleury free to take up parish work in another diocese for a limited time, without, however, loosing him in any other respect from his canonical obedience as a priest of the Gréal Diocese.

Shortly afterwards the Abbé, who had now completed his second year of tutoring, and was spending his holiday at Loirolles, received the following gratifying announcement:

'The Abbé Valentin Roy, Honorary Canon, Curé of Saint-Louis, Montverdun, is pleased to inform Monsieur Fleury that he is appointed Vicaire of Saint-Louis. He is

requested to come and take up his new duties as soon as convenient. Will he at the same time be good enough to thank Monsieur Balure, and to notify him of this appointment?'

A month later the Abbé entered upon his new sphere of work, the last post he was to occupy in the Church of Rome. The time of release, of light, and of liberty, was at hand.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST APPOINTMENT

THE Curé of Saint-Louis was a capital fellow. Son of a very rich farmer, he prided himself on keeping an abundant table. Never were Vicaires better fed than the Vicaires of Monsieur Roy. Town Curés rarely treat their Vicaires in this way. After Abbé Fleury had settled at Saint-Louis he was told the story of a Vicaire of Montverdun who, tired of the meagre fare allowed him by the Curé of his parish, so far forgot himself as to wrap up in a newspaper the miserable helping that had fallen to his share at dinner and take it to the Bishop. The laughter of the parish at this affront to the Curé did not mend matters, for the Curé, having the power of the last word, sacked the Vicaire, which gave rise to the saying that Curé 'Goldenpurse' had taken the place of Curé 'Goldenmonth.' Nothing of that sort could happen at Saint-Louis. Monsieur Roy had the reputation of being a most prodigal entertainer, and he lived up to it. He kept open house, so that friends constantly dropped in uninvited and without warning.

When Abbé Fleury was appointed Vicaire, Monsieur Roy had been Curé of Montverdun for ten years. He had been a country parson for thirty years, and he owed his appointment to this important parish to the friendship of a

Grand Vicar, as well as to his own private fortune. Saint-Louis was a new parish, only just founded. It needed a Curé with private means to complete the church, and to build a presbytery, and to found the schools of the confraternity, so Monsieur Roy was obviously the man for the post. The church had no bell until he presented a couple. He also extended two aisles as far as the transept, and the builder was rewarded by receiving an honorary canonry. A fine presbytery soon sprang up beside the church, then a school for the nuns, and then one for the monks. If Monsieur Roy did not accomplish all this at his own cost, as some insinuated, he at all events found the sums required and the generous donors. His one idea in life was to build. He had a large library, but more for show than because he had a love of books.

Every Sunday he delivered a fifteen minutes' address, repeating the same course of sermons year after year. He left all serious preaching to his Vicaires. His work was in stone and lime; he had stones and mortar on the brain. He spent the whole day hovering round the workmen. As soon as he had said Mass and swallowed his breakfast, he hastened off to the scaffolding, not always, however, to the delight of the masons. He was a judge of stone, and understood the differences in limes, and kept the builders strictly up to their contract. He was a typical building Curé, and chuckled when visitors found him up to the eyes in dust and rubbish.

During the week the Vicaires of Saint-Louis said the earliest Masses of the day, and the Curé the last one, so that in this way the Masses for the dead and other remunerative Masses fell to his share. Except four or five times at the great festivals, Monsieur Roy never sang the solemn Mass on Sunday, his part being to make the collection, in the not unreasonable hope that some members of

the congregation might be less reluctant to give if the Curé himself held out the bag. They were less likely to bury their heads in their prayer-books, and pretend not to see, when he stood before them and thrust the bag without respect of persons under their noses. This statement is not intended as a censure upon the good man, but only to show how he managed these things. Moreover, Abbé Fleury was very glad that his new Curé should take this line, because the long fast necessitated by the late celebrations on Sundays had tried him very much; and nothing was more distasteful to him than to pass down the ranks of worshippers with the bag in his hand. Pence-hunting seemed to him to be quite out of place at such a time. To set collecting-boxes for the benefit of the poor at the church door may be right enough, but to disturb prayer by making forcible inquisition can hardly be a fit proceeding in the House of God. If it is necessary to do this collecting, would it not be more fitting that it should be done by a verger or a beadle, than by a priest of Christ?[1] The proper place for the minister of God is the Christian pulpit, with the word of good tidings and of truth in his mouth.

The only serious altercation that Abbé Fleury had with the Curé of Saint-Louis arose out of a question of church sittings. There were no free seats in the church for the poor, and the Abbé was bold enough to refer his Curé to the decree of the Council,[2] by which every Curé was obliged to provide free seats for the poor. At this Monsieur Roy became scarlet with anger, and replied:

'Would you wish our churches to be like Protestant conventicles, where anyone may go in and sit down without having to loose the strings of his purse?'

'I see no particular harm in it.'

[1] Possiby the author would approve of our custom of making the collection while people stand up to sing.

[2] Of Trent.

'It is easy to see that you have never been a Curé. We shall see how it will be when you come to be responsible for the upkeep. The seat-rents are our best sources of revenue.'

'Admitting, sir, that chair-rents is an unavoidable evil, and that the stability and care of the fabric is involved in the sale of the right to sit down, would it not be possible to confine this tax to people of means?' the Abbé persisted.

'Anyone can see that you have had no experience, my poor Abbé. Everyone would then plead poverty in order to escape having to pay.'

'How can one tell? Are you quite sure of this, sir? It might be worth while to put it to the test.'

'But,' replied the Curé, 'you surely know what has happened at Notre-Dame, where five or six rows of free seats are reserved? Hardly anyone sits in them.'

'And you cannot fail to know why, sir,' said the Abbé. 'These benches have been placed at the far end of the church, in a dark corner of one of the aisles.'

'And where would you have them?'

'Anywhere, so long as the poor people who are to sit on them can see the priest at the altar, and more especially the preacher in the pulpit. And, furthermore, is it not a cruel thing to affix on them such a notice as "Seats for paupers."'

'Nothing satisfies you, evidently.'

'Just consider a moment, sir: do you not think that it must be extremely painful for those poor souls, already, maybe, sufficiently embitted by their wretchedness, to have public attention thus drawn to their destitution? Is it either Christian or charitable? I am sure that were you to allot several rows, your kindness of heart would prompt you to abstain from putting up any such notice. Everyone has some self-respect. You simply tell the keeper of the chairs not to accept payment for these places.'

A priest at Montverdun, with whom Abbé Fleury became acquainted, was undoubtedly, to a great extent, responsible for destroying the young priest's illusions. This man was, moreover, a priest of distinction, earnest and hard-working. The Bishop of Montverdun did not love him overmuch, for, unlike some Bishops who take delight in being surrounded by mitres, and in being attended by a body-guard of violet cassocks, Monsignor Rovières preferred to be the only person in the diocese who could be saluted as 'Monsignor.'

Abbé Elié had studied theology in Rome, and after he had gained his D.D. had for some time occupied the position of secretary to a Cardinal of the Curia, and on his departure from Rome the honorary dignity of a prelate was conferred upon him.[1] On his return to Montverdun, however, he had found it advisable to conceal his honours, and except on great festivals, and in the unpretentious chapel of the convent of which he was chaplain, he never ventured to exhibit his violet cassock with its red facings. Monsignor Elié was recognised as a rising man, even by his fellows who were jealous of him, and who on that account would sometimes try to belittle him.

This Monsignor Elié was a friend of Monsieur Roy, the Curé of Saint-Louis, and often came to the presbytery. The few years he had passed in Rome had not been without their effect upon him. It has been said: *Roma veduta, fede perdita* (To see Rome is to lose faith). Had Abbé Elié kept his faith intact? Ambition well knows how to conceal the underlying motives of the heart. However that might be, he loved to tell spicy anecdotes about the ecclesiastical world of Rome—its little underhand tricks, its skilful moves, its intrigues, its rivalries; and he worked

[1] Members of the Pope's household and others receive the right to be addressed as Monsignor.

out every little detail with such vivacity and verisimilitude, not even omitting names and full circumstances, that the listener, sitting comfortably before the fire, could not doubt the trustworthiness of the witness. And Abbé Fleury, who hitherto had looked upon great men of the Church as belonging to a superior order of beings, and who had loved to clothe them with ideal perfections as vessels made to honour, and filled with the Holy Ghost, felt his respect for them ebbing away and his trust in them betrayed. This brutal dissection which laid bare so much that was only human, where he had loved to believe there was so much that was superhuman, and which, moreover, showed human nature to be such a very poor thing even at the best, shook his soul to its foundation, as if he had been an idol-worshipper witnessing the destruction of his images. He was shown these Monsignors boldly and openly playing the beggar, courting favour by flattery; Cardinals also, by guile and intrigue, making use of every means of influence, and even stooping to trickery to raise themselves a little nearer to the Chair of St. Peter, which was their goal.

And there, too, was the Pope, kept ignorant of real facts, content to be hoodwinked without moving a finger. That, then, was the Papal Court. Instead of its being the embodiment of all that is great and divine, lo! there were only meannesses and littlenesses. On that stage nothing was presented to the public but scenic effect; the real piece was being played in the wings, and that, after all, was light comedy. Such thoughts stirred the heart of Abbé Fleury to its depths. Not that he had as yet conceived the idea of breaking off his connection with the Church, in order to find that sincerity which he had not been able to discover within her; but they unconsciously affected him, and loosened him here and there from his moorings, and upset one after another his fondest illusions.

Expressions which Abbé Fleury had let fall from time to time, and which the others regarded as spoken in jest, Monsieur Roy was clear-sighted enough to estimate more justly, and to ascribe aright to the deep impression that had been made on the young priest by the true stories of Monsignor Elié. But when the Abbé made pointed efforts to give the conversation a turn in that direction, the Curé did his best to evade any such discussion, and to provide other subjects of conversation.

The Abbé had chosen as his confessor a Regular belonging to the town, who confessed both the Bishop and a goodly number of other priests as well. Father Eleazar was an exceptionally holy man. Of a kindly and humorous disposition, he had no enemies. To him the Abbé made known the thoughts that troubled him, and one day, after receiving absolution, he rose from the prie-dieu[1] and said:

'My Father, I think I am in a fair way to lose the faith.'

'You surely do not seriously mean what you say?'

'I do indeed; I have begun to have serious doubts as to the Church being the very Church of Jesus Christ.'

'Come, come, my poor dear friend,' said the confessor indulgently, 'reconsider the matter. Pay no attention to the weak points. Take a broad view of the whole question. Pray about it. The Pope is certainly, and of a truth, the Vicar of our Saviour.'

'It seems to me, however,' the Abbé replied, 'that to take a broad view is impossible when I see nothing but weak points everywhere. If the dignitaries of the Church say and do such things, what can their belief be? Have

[1] A low chair with a high back, on which worshippers kneel in many Roman Catholic churches, the floors being generally of stone, and not overclean.

they any faith at all? And these men are in touch with the Pope.'

'Then, you would do well not to reason about it any more, or pride will destroy you. Say your rosary carefully, read your breviary with more earnestness than ever, humble yourself before God, and you will see that your mind will rid itself of these idle tales.'

Once more, therefore, Abbé Fleury resolved to check his curiosity, and restrain it from an indiscreet investigation of the forbidden. He tried to keep himself from thinking, so that his salvation might not be endangered by exposing his faith to temptation.

The time of his deliverance was at hand, but, nevertheless, the full light of truth was not to be revealed to the Abbé all at once. The first step would simply be that of asserting his liberty; and once free, he would soon learn to know the Gospel, and to press it to its logical conclusion. He had not yet arrived at that stage; he still strove to retain his illusions, as if illusions could bring peace.

While looking for a residence for the parents of his former pupil, Abbé Fleury made the acquaintance of an elderly Protestant English lady. In conversation he mentioned her name to Father Eleazar.

'Ah!' exclaimed the good Father, 'I see a way by which you may overcome your doubts and win back your peace. Convert her to the faith. Teach her the Catechism.'

Therefore the Abbé began to work upon the lady in all sincerity and simplicity, and he succeeded in communicating to her his own fear of hell, so that she lost her balance. Then Father Eleazar came to his aid, and the lady was won over. After a short time the Father, taking everything into his own hands, examined her on the Catechism in her own house. As he was the Bishop's confessor, he had no difficulty in obtaining from His

Greatness the necessary dispensation and authorization for removing the case from the jurisdiction of the parish Curé.

In this proceeding we see a sample of how the Regulars interfere in a parish. Possibly things might not have gone so smoothly or so rapidly had the lady been poor. As it was, the Father confessed the neophyte whom he had rushed off her feet rather than convinced, and the Bishop, at his instigation, consented to confirm the new convert in the private chapel of the episcopal palace. The Abbé could not help remarking to Father Eleazar that they seemed to be proceeding rather fast, but the Father told him not to put himself about, as he took all responsibility upon his own shoulders. 'Do you not know,' he said, 'that the Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and that the power of Divine grace is illimitable?'

Of course, the Abbé could but give way, and the grateful lady presented him with the sum of twenty pounds to enable him to follow the advice of his doctor, and go to drink the waters at Canterets. By one of life's ironies, or, rather, by the evident working of Providence, it happened that on his return from that expedition the Abbé met the lady whose entrance into his life led him to the Christianity of a Reformed Church.

After the first Communion of the newly-confirmed children of Saint-Louis had taken place, the Abbé, according to the custom which is almost general in large towns, had a right to a month's holiday, and he went off to the Pyrenees. In the midst of this magnificent and sublime panorama, with its towering background of snow-capped mountains, the Abbé was not insensible to that subtle influence which penetrates every soul in sympathy with Nature at its grandest, filling it with inexpressible longings which nothing the hither side of infinity can satisfy. There

is no doubt that amongst the solitude of the peaks the conventions of civilized society lose their power over the mind of man. There, if ever, man's highest and truest instincts come into play, and the silence of the mountain-top dispels dogma, and compels the consideration of both the primal and the ultimate truths of religion. There the soul is brought into direct contact with the Eternal Godhead. Here for the first time the Abbé felt something of the grandeur of a religion whose aim was to bring man face to face with God, and into direct and immediate contact with Him. He would often now meditate in some quiet nook on the littlenesses which Monsignor Elié had exposed. How human it all appeared to be! how earthly, and how contrary to religion! But he would pull himself together quickly, and recall his wandering thoughts. Was that ideal religion anything more than the fiction of a diseased imagination? Does not God desire to be served in due form and by liturgical worship? Is not every aspiration that has not received the hall-mark of Rome's approval vain and useless? All his early education rose up in arms. The artificial in him fought with the natural for the conquest of his reason; and the principle of obedience won the day.

In the hotel at Cauterets, where our Abbé was staying, he met at table the portly and consequential Curé of a large parish; also a radical Deputy. To our Abbé, in his present censorious mood, it was rare sport to watch how these opponents thrust and parried. The discussions, however heated, were always conducted with perfect courtesy and politeness, although the conversation touched the fringe of the burning topics of the day; and he marvelled to see how skilfully the Curé managed to withdraw from an argument when he found himself out of his depth or on slippery ground. But whereas the Deputy expressed his

thoughts with clearness, and frankly spoke out all that was in his mind, the Curé constantly endeavoured to envelop his replies in vague explanations, which deceived no one but himself, that he might all the more easily avoid the humiliation of being worsted.

So again, as at Mataris, where he had conversed with the naval officers, the Abbé saw exemplified how far the man of the world excels the ecclesiastic in lucidity, simplicity, and sincerity of speech.

The holiday had passed quickly, and was almost over, and Abbé Fleury would very soon have to return to Montverdun. Unknown to him, the decisive period of his life was at hand. He had been priest now for seven years. He had been disappointed, not to say deceived, more than once, and many of his illusions had melted away. Contact with the world had insensibly shattered the edifice his ecclesiastical education had constructed, but he had actually reached his thirty-second year, and yet his heart had not made itself heard. No woman had made a lasting impression on him. His mother was the only one he had really loved. But now his heart is to be suddenly taken by storm, and the long-dormant energies of natural affection are to awaken. Hitherto Abbé Fleury has been a priest whose horizon has been artificially restricted; he is now about to discover that he also is a man.

CHAPTER XII

STRUGGLES AND MARRIAGE

ON his return journey Abbé Fleury stopped at Ralesse to have luncheon in the station refreshment-room, and there chance placed him opposite a young lady of modest and refined appearance and manner. Neighbours at *table d'hôte* easily and naturally fall into conversation, but on this occasion every little remark that the girl made gave the Abbé an unusual sensation of pleasure. His soul seemed bathed in a penetrating ether which came he knew not how or whence. Yet if anyone had suggested that his heart, hitherto unresponsive to natural affection, was now going forth a blindfold captive in the bonds of love, he would have smiled derisively.

Of course, he was delighted to learn that her journey took her in the direction of Montverdun, and that, consequently, he might look forward to another hour of her company in which to continue the agreeable conversation; and when it came out, in further talk, that his companion was to pass through Montverdun with her mother in a few days' time, he made her promise to bring her mother to see him at the presbytery of Saint-Louis.

After the young lady had got out of the train, the Abbé found his solitude for the remainder of his long journey all the more irksome by reason of that one happy hour.

Little did he think that there nestled in his heart a germinating affection that would prove to be of vigorous growth.

Arrived at Saint-Louis, he entered on his vicarial duties with renewed health and vigour, but, somehow, his work no longer interested him as it had done aforetime. The daily routine, which had become mechanical, got on his nerves. Everything seemed hollow, and the future as dismal and monotonous as a desert. His soul languished, and yearned for he knew not what, for at first he failed to recognise the true cause of this new experience. He deserved pity, not as a simpleton or an ignoramus, but for never having known what it was to live. How could he suspect that his heart, which had lain so long untouched, would at last be smitten, and that his turn had now come to be storm-tossed by the hurricane of love, that in its long delay had but been gathering power? Even his beloved books, his life's companions, failed to lighten his burden, and they, too, became wearisome. He could not fix his attention, for his mind wandered away from the open page. What was wrong? What could it all mean? he asked himself. And when one day he set himself resolutely to analyze his day-dreams, he perceived that the disturbing element was a woman's profile. But why it should so torment him he could not tell. This unusual state of things could not, of course, be allowed to continue, and he imagined that the best thing to do, under the circumstances, would be to try to see this young woman again, of whom he had had but a passing glimpse, and yet whose memory flooded his whole being. He therefore wrote to remind her of her promise to break her journey for a few hours on her way through Montverdun. It was only a commonplace little note, that on any other occasion he would have dashed off in three minutes, but which now seemed to be a letter of critical

importance. And of critical importance it was as things turned out.

The Abbé honestly believed, in the innocence of ignorance, that a short interview with his goddess would dethrone her and cure his infatuation. He did not even yet realize that he loved.

She replied, in a charming little note, saying that she had not forgotten her promise, and would fulfil it shortly. Anxious and disquieted, almost apprehensive, yet happy withal, the poor Abbé spent a few terribly restless days. His mind was alternately filled with joy and fear, without his being able to identify the cause of so much mental disturbance.

At length, one morning, just as he was leaving the presbytery, he caught sight of the travellers just arrived from Ralesse. His heart gave a great bound, and he held out his hand with such a feeling of emotion that he could not entirely suppress its trembling. The girl blushed, and she, too, showed signs of some agitation.

The Abbé, as was the custom of the Vicaires of Saint-Louis, conducted his visitors into his study. The conversation was disjointed and fitful, and whenever the Abbé's eye met the glance of his young visitor the whole room seemed filled with brightness. Two souls had come within the range of a mutual attraction that must draw them ever closer and closer together, over every obstacle, overcoming every resistance. By the time the visit came to an end, they had promised to write to each other, and, should circumstances permit, to meet again. The Abbé felt a lump rise in his throat as he bid them good-bye, and he experienced an intense relief and delight when he heard their pleasant reply of 'Au revoir!' But when he found himself alone again, how empty his room seemed, how sad and desolate! Something had him by the throat, and for

the first time in his life he allowed himself to give way to hysterical outbursts of long fits of weeping. There was no sleep for him that night; and on the morrow, when the hour came for saying Mass, he was seized by scruples of conscience. For during that long night of sleepless tossing he had probed to the depths of his heart, and had found hidden there a living love, living and triumphing in being alive. Could he, then, conscious of such feelings, dare to approach the altar? Was he still worthy to consecrate the Holy Host! His soul was no longer God's alone. Of a truth, he had not had until now even a thought of offending against God. But to harbour in his soul the presence of a love other than that of God was surely a crime. He knelt long on the altar-steps, praying earnestly, and humbling himself before God, imploring forgiveness for his sin. But the sin had been committed. For him there could be no more rest. Day followed day, and the mischief, instead of diminishing, only went on increasing. At last, one day, after resisting the temptation for a long time, he wrote to the girl, and asked her to send him her news. A reply came, and a correspondence ensued.

Suddenly one day, like the match of an incendiary, the thought of marriage lighted upon the Abbé's mind. But he put it from him quickly, and, prostrating himself before the crucifix, implored the God of mercy to pardon him, and to restore peace to his soul.

At one time he had paid a visit to the monastery of La Grande Chartreuse, and had brought back with him a disciplinary scourge. This he now seized, and beat himself with it unmercifully. Then he let fifteen days go by without writing to the young lady, thinking that silence, absence, and time would cure him. But to a man in love absence and time are as nothing. Notwithstanding all he could do, the thought of marriage would not be banished,

and he began to argue with himself concerning the law of celibacy. He took down books, and searched for the origin of that law, whose yoke seemed to him to be inhuman. He learned that the celibacy of the priesthood is not taught in the Gospel, that the Apostles had married, and that it was, therefore, a law of *man's* making. Was the Pope justified in imposing such a restriction on individual freedom? And he called to mind all that Monsignor Elié had recounted of the Papal Court. By degrees in this way the spirit of revolt was born in him, and it appeared to him that he had an inherent right to liberty of action.[1]

During these days of doubt and fear Abbé Fleury received a visit from a former Vicaire of Loirolles with whom he was on very intimate terms. Abbé Fleury kept his secret to himself; he merely expressed his doubts as to the authority of the Church. Without in any way committing himself, he insinuated that the Roman Church had no right to impose these unscriptural burdens for all time.

'My dear fellow,' said the old Vicaire, 'I see that you are seriously ill. I am going to Lourdes, and I will offer many prayers to the Virgin that you may be cured before my return.'

'Do not speak to me of Lourdes,' Monsieur Fleury replied. 'I saw the place in passing, on my return from Cauterets. It is Vanity Fair. Shops on every hand, a place of pilgrimage which struck me like nothing but an insatiable money-box.'

'But that is rank blasphemy!' exclaimed the horrified Vicaire. 'It is very wrong to give me the pain of listening to such language.' And the old priest went away with a

[1] The mistake of the Church of Rome in requiring her priests to remain celibate so long as they continue to exercise the functions of the priesthood may not be great, but to put pressure upon them to continue celibate is surely a colossal error.

sad heart, filled with a presentiment of what was about to happen. And Abbé Fleury continued to suffer and to doubt.

'What shall I do after I am married, if I do marry?' he said to himself. 'We must live. The question of ways and means must be solved. My little savings will be swallowed up by the many initial expenses, and after that what have we to look to?'

And a voice replied, the voice of a new man: 'I shall work. I shall gain my bread by the sweat of my brow, as others have to do. I can face it with courage. If we continue to serve God faithfully, He will not forsake us.'

One great fear, however, assailed him—the fear of what the world would say. What would the parish think? May not weak souls be tempted to evil? And yet another thought, still more excruciating to contemplate, arose in his mind. 'All my friends, all the companions of my youth, will turn their backs on me, and I shall be alone in the world. I shall have to face nothing but open hostility, despite, and aspersions of my motives.' But a steady voice in his heart made answer: 'If thy friends of yesterday abandon thee, to-morrow thou shalt find others. If a few of the faithful fall away from the Church on thy account, there is no reason to believe that they will also fall away from God. And the God who cares for the little birds will both care for thee and for these. Only act steadfastly in obedience to the voice of conscience, and all will be well.'

A last objection, however, seemed to be insurmountable. Fear of scandal, uncertainty for the morrow, and the loss of friends, he could confidently leave in God's hands; and his mind was firmly convinced that the law of celibacy imposed on priests of Christ's Church was a law of human invention, having no place in the Gospel. But the thought that barred his progress was this: 'Whatever the Roman

rule of celibacy may be, still, you have accepted it, and you have, furthermore, vowed to be faithful to it so long as life shall last. Your own word binds you. If you break your word, you will not only cease to be a priest and a Christian, but you will no longer even be an honest man.' That was what stayed him the longest, and grieved him the most sorely. His mind had been so warped by sophistry in the long course of training to which he had been subjected, that he could not at once see clearly. Little by little his judgment overcame its early bias. When he made that vow he knew next to nothing of its purport. He ought not, therefore, to be held to a word spoken under the influence of illusion and of mystic fervour—a word, moreover, that bound him to what was not human, but against nature. An arbitrary regulation should not prevail against the liberty which is not thus restricted in the Gospel. The Church cannot change the nature of things. Marriage being a good thing in itself, it follows that it is a good thing for mankind.

So far Abbé Fleury had not called in question all the distinctly Romish doctrines. His judgment had as yet only risen up in arms against one oppressive act of discipline. It was by slow degrees that he came to the full conviction that he might conscientiously, and with Divine approval, follow the dictates of his heart. After much study and reflection he honestly believed that he might be assured of the legitimacy of the marriage of a priest. He did not reach that conclusion without bitter suffering, but once his conscience spoke in harmony with his heart, he took the decisive step, and asked in marriage the hand of the young woman he loved. Then he wrote to Monsignor Rovières, and told his Curé merely that he was giving up parochial work in order to take up teaching. And although the manner in which he committed this particular act was

misinterpreted, he chose this way of doing it with a charitable intent to spare weak souls. He left his post of his own free will and deliberate choice, and a new life opened out before him.

There are those who at the same time live both 'outside marriage and outside celibacy,' as Chamfort remarks. The Abbé, more logical and more honest than these, married openly. Later his consistency was imputed to him as a crime.

Monsieur Fleury left Saint-Louis for Marville, where his fiancée lived. He first of all bought clothes, so as to be dressed like everybody else, and searched about for a small suite of rooms which could be occupied at once, and which he could make ready for his wife after marriage. Meanwhile Monsieur Balure, who had been moved from Bakou to the Seminary of Marville, had been forewarned, by the Curé of Saint-Louis, of the Abbé's decision to give up parochial work, and of his departure. The old Director took the field as soon as possible. The fugitive had not been at Marville a fortnight before Monsieur Balure had discovered his address, and sent him the following letter:

'My poor Boy,

'Allow me to address you so. I have heard of your fatal determination, and as you know how I love you, I implore you to proceed no further along the road you have taken. Turn back while there is yet time. Soon it will be too late. Do not commit sacrilege. Come and see me. You will find in me a friend and a father.

'Balure.'

Monsieur Fleury had no desire for a meeting with Monsieur Balure, dreading to distress a man whom he oved so well, and fearing to have his own resolution

weakened in addition. So he sent this short note in reply:

'I am grieved to be the cause of pain to you, but the die has been cast. Conscience is now my guide, and God is my witness. It is better that I should be an honest family man than a bad priest.'

Monsieur Fleury's fiancée was a Protestant, who had come with her mother to France from the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland. With them on the Sunday following he went for the first time to worship in a Protestant temple.[1] He was most unfavourably impressed. Accustomed from his infancy to the pomp with which the Roman liturgy is celebrated, he found the series of hymns, Bible readings, and prayers, cold and uninteresting. But the sermon made up for all. Pasteur Conder was the preacher. The subject of his discourse was 'The Relation between Faith and Work in the Life of a Christian.' With burning eloquence, and in an accent of profound conviction, the pastor presented the Pauline doctrine with learning and wisdom. Monsieur Fleury did not lose a single word, and his mind was thoroughly satisfied.

Pasteur Conder also it was who married the young couple shortly afterwards. The ex-priest wished to have God's blessing on the marriage. Nothing could ever have made him consent to enter the marriage state without a service of prayer to inaugurate their new life.[2]

However, had the celibacy of the clergy been the only point on which Monsieur Fleury found himself at variance with the Roman Catholic Church, he would never have become a Protestant. The hidden and unsuspected leaven which had begun to work havoc with the beliefs inculcated

[1] In France all Protestant churches are called 'temples.'

[2] A marriage before the Registrar only would have been quite a legal marriage.

in his sacerdotal training, had not yet ceased to be active. Even on the eve of his marriage, Abbé Fleury, deserter as he was from the clerical corps, would not have been able to say, had he been questioned on the subject, 'I am a Protestant.' He recognised the absolute futility of applying to a priest for the consecration of such a marriage. Besides, she who was to become Madame Fleury would never have consented to what would have been contrary to her principles. So they went to the temple.

Pasteur Conder, thoroughly informed of the particulars concerning this marriage of a former priest, gave an address full of sympathy and encouragement. Divining intuitively that the work in the soul of the man was only half accomplished, he made no allusion to the past, but directed his gaze to his future course, as it was spread out before him in the light of Truth. The dawn breaks and dispels the darkness, but man needs more than the light of dawn: he needs full daylight, the possession of the full and entire truth, as well as liberty of soul.

Then he offered up an extempore prayer such as the Abbé had never heard before, a prayer which went straight to his heart to an extent the like of which the mechanical recitations of the breviary, or the other prayers of the Church, recited as vain repetitions, had never been able to do. In the vestry Monsieur Conder gave the newly-married pair a large Bible, saying: 'Take this Book, Monsieur Fleury; in this, and in prayer, you will find truth and peace.'

The pastor spoke advisedly. Nevertheless, before Abbé Fleury could obtain a settled and lasting peace, he had yet to experience agonies, strivings, heart-searchings, and doubtings. As a married man Monsieur Fleury found himself on the threshold of a new life. A man must have once been a priest to know how strange and embarrassing

the common life of man may be when it is entered upon after a certain age. What seems quite natural to others appears to him extraordinary. So for the erstwhile Abbé there were many surprises and bewilderments in store. But he soon adapted himself to the realities of ordinary life. Moreover, as his savings were soon spent, he was obliged to concentrate all his energies on the necessity for earning daily bread, and the thought of how best to find work soon absorbed his mind entirely. Here was indeed a problem as puzzling to solve, for a priest entering upon civil life, as it was pressing. As a rule, the man who has been a priest knows no trade. His ten fingers and his muscles are of no use to him, because they have never been brought into exercise. He was certainly proficient in a few branches of knowledge; of others he knew rather less, but still something; and he might give lessons in Latin and Greek, at least to beginners, that being, undoubtedly, the work for which he was best qualified.

A cassock can make its way into any house; the clerical dress can open all doors, even if it may sometimes cover a fundamental ineptitude. The absence of the cassock, on the other hand, condemns the ex-priest to exclusion. Where is the family in which an unfrocked priest would be received? Should any be found who are enlightened and honest enough to confide to such a one the instruction of their children, they are indeed rare, as Monsieur Fleury learned to his cost; and those who did open their doors to him did not long retain the courage of their opinions: for as soon as their friends learned that the tutor had once been a priest, insinuations were made, almost amounting to accusations, of such a kind, and of such persistency, that the tutor found himself bowed out with thanks, and with many halting and transparent excuses and explanations.

However, more fortunate than many another in his

position might have been, Monsieur Fleury obtained a situation as correspondent in an important house of business at Marville, before he had been very long on quest. His duty, which was to write business letters, was not beyond his capabilities, nor was he kept long waiting for the first instalment of the salary he received. The payment was small—six pounds a month—but it sufficed for his needs. It certainly did not spell affluence, but for the newly-married couple, happy in one another, and without very many wants, it secured all that was necessary.

Monsieur Fleury's life would now have followed the normal course, if the whole of his moral being had been transformed at the same time, and as completely as his material circumstances had been; but, unhappily, it had not

CHAPTER XIII

THE INFLUENCE OF A DIRECTOR

MONSIEUR BALURE, who for nearly ten years had been the director and guide of Abbé Fleury's conscience, was now living in the same town. At the time of the Abbé's mental liberation and marriage, Monsieur Balure had urged him to turn back from the very threshold of his new existence. The Abbé had held on firmly; nevertheless, he had allowed himself to be drawn into a secret correspondence which was to entail much suffering to both of them. It must not he forgotten that Monsieur Balure had in the past sustained and comforted him, in difficult and painfully disconcerting circumstances of a somewhat intimate nature, and thus it was that Monsieur Fleury was unwilling to break off that old friendship on which he had leaned for so long. That was his excuse, but it led to his undoing.

The exchange of letters was followed by personal interviews. All Monsieur Balure's letters ended with the words, *Veni cito, invenies patrem* (Come soon, and you will find a father); and Monsieur Fleury was simple enough to think that his Director would place friendship before priestcraft, would accept accomplished facts, would continue to be his friend, and would aid him in securing a means of livelihood. So one day he went to meet Monsieur

Balure at the Great Seminary of Marville, going, however, without the knowledge of his wife, which was, of course, inexcusable. The first interview with his Director was particularly touching. Monsieur Balure, opening his arms to the prodigal, murmured, 'Poor boy, my poor boy!' and, while tears coursed down his cheeks, lovingly reproached him for the course he had taken. The Director knew his man. He was well aware, from long experience, that his disciple would follow the dictates of his conscience to any extremity, once he believed that he clearly heard its voice. Gently, then, and adroitly, he once again presented the Romish fallacies, attractively enveloped in the language of affection, hoping thus to reawaken the principles that had exercised such influence in the past. And he drove them home by a puissant appeal to the old terrors, saying with all the sympathy of earnest solicitude: 'Believe me, I speak only with an eye to your eternal salvation, and I say it in God's name; the road upon which you have entered leads straight to hell, and not only for yourself, but also for her to whom you have joined yourself. You have no right to withdraw the vow and promise made to God and to the Church. It is nothing less than sacrilege.'

And when Monsieur Fleury interposed, saying, 'But I love her; I cannot be separated from her,' M. Balure replied:

'The greatest proof of love that you can give her is to save her from perdition by yourself leaving the road that leads to it, and into which you have enticed her.'

Then when Monsieur Fleury urged that he was married, and that thereby he was in duty bound to be true and faithful to his wife, and so could not offer to the Church a submission which involved the violation of such a fundamental obligation, Monsieur Balure asserted that in the sight of God there had been no marriage.

'In God's eyes,' he said, 'you are living in sin. Be thankful that God has not given you a child, because it would have been illegitimate. You are not married in the sight of God.' And he repeatedly interjected: 'You know well how dear you are to me. As your father, I beseech you to go away and separate from her; otherwise you are both doomed to unhappiness in this life and to outer darkness in the next.'

Monsieur Fleury came away violently disturbed from this interview. 'Here,' he said to himself, 'is a man who loves me with all his heart. He is much older than I am, and consequently has more experience than I have, and is more clear-sighted. He may be right.' A spirit of clerical pedantry oppressed him, yet he made one last struggle. He began to seek for guidance in the Bible, and no longer in human theorizings; and when next he went to see Monsieur Balure, drawn thither by friendship and by a daily growing fear lest he should be becoming self-deceived, and thereby should lose his soul, he was able to advance texts from the Bible in support of his case.

But Monsieur Balure was not to be taken unawares, and he said: 'All that you have quoted from the Scriptures is perfectly true, but it applies solely to the laity. You, on the other hand, are a priest, before all subject to the law of the Church; a priest you are, and a priest you must always remain.'

'Nevertheless,' interposed Monsieur Fleury, 'did not Bossuet say, "For a priest to marry is to sin against discipline; but to separate from his wife after marriage is a sin against natural law"?'

'Nothing of the sort,' exclaimed the Director. 'Bossuet never said such a thing. The statement is apocryphal. You are nothing but a rebel, and if you will not render submission to the Church, to whom you owe allegiance

before all things, you will lose the faith, and will become an apostate.'

It would be impossible to describe Monsieur Fleury's sufferings in the battle on whose issue his heart was at stake. His religious training had succeeded in stimulating the desire for personal salvation, until it had become the principal motive-power in his life. Hell was his main terror; the salvation of his soul was his chief and only care. His heart was therefore tortured by every sort of anxiety. Still incapable of exercising an unaided judgment or of shaking off the habit of obedience, and overborne by the thought of that great friendship which spoke to him in God's name, he wavered, he feared, he suffered tortures. Were he to part from her, and go away to another land, he should leave behind him a despair as profound as that which he should carry away in his own bosom. By the same blow two lives would be struck down by his hand; and the thought of it wrung his soul.

But Monsieur Balure had reminded him of the Lord's own words: 'Whosoever loveth father, or mother, or wife more than Me, is not worthy of Me'; and as at the time Monsieur Fleury did not notice their irrelevancy, his heart trembled with fear lest he should indeed be unworthy of his Lord. Over his head hung the avenging sword of Divine justice, which sooner or later must fall. So he prayed, and chastened his soul with abstinence from everything that was pleasant, and, fearing to add to his sin, he came by degrees to regard his wife in the light of a sister, greatly to the pain and distress of her whom he loved more than life itself. Poor young thing! she felt instinctively that her husband's soul was seriously perturbed; but she had no suspicion of the terrible misfortune that threatened her.

The gloom settled deeper over Monsieur Fleury's spirit. His natural conscience recoiled from the thought of the

sin of deserting his wife. But fear of hell got the upper hand, and the artificial conscience, the creature of his education, excited by the persistent efforts of Monsieur Balure, upreared before him an imaginary duty with an imprescriptible claim. At the same time a vague idea still clung to his mind that it might nevertheless be possible to love God, and to live according to His laws in the world as a good Christian should. But his distorted soul asked itself if such a religion could really be the true one, and the anathemas of the Church of Rome, with their 'Outside of the Church there is no salvation,' confused his thoughts and troubled the natural honesty of his character. Before all else the Abbé's overmastering desire was to escape hell, and to save his soul at all costs. All his moral difficulties and his wrestlings with his religious scruples bore direct relation to that.

Then it was that the old Director said to him: 'Your soul is passing through the valley of the shadow. God is leaving you to yourself. Obedience alone can give you victory and light. Go away without further hesitation, without any more arguing and self-torture. Part from her, I command you in God's Name. Part from her; I take upon myself all responsibility, whatsoever may be the consequences of your departure either to yourself or to her.'

Several months before, Monsieur Balure had settled upon the convent that should serve as a refuge for his 'prodigal son,' as he termed Monsieur Fleury. But fearing lest the Abbé's mind had not come to see quite clearly, and that a reaction of conscientious scruples might supervene, and fearing also lest the strong love of his heart might bring him home again, the Director had sought for a monastery afar off in another hemisphere; and thus it came about that the Abbé consented to go off to America. Monsieur Balure was to defray all the expenses of the journey, everything

was soon in readiness, and nothing remained for the Abbé but to take his leave. So a day came when, wearied with the struggle, and fancying that this self-sacrifice was required of him in God's service, he finally had the courage completely to crush his heart, and he went. However, he did not go without promising himself, in order to satisfy that portion of his soul which still rebelled, and which he was doing his best to smother in the name of obedience to a Divine law, that he would on his way through Paris see the leading Protestant pastor, of whom he had often heard. How was it that he failed to see this man at that period? God willed it so, and had ordained that the Abbé was to suffer yet more. In Paris he went to the central houses of a religious Order where Monsieur Balure had made arrangements to have him received. It was from there that, on the eve of his departure for Havre, he wrote this last letter to his wife:

'My DEAR WIFE,

'Jesus alone can comfort you, and He will do so, if you give yourself entirely to Him. I love you as much as ever, but henceforth it will be with a love that is above nature, and therefore permissible. I no longer either need or desire a love that is forbidden. I have not seen these Protestant leaders, and I shall possibly not try to see them; for what would be the good? I have seen here holy men who are thoroughly conversant with their ideas and with their theories, who tell me what these are worth, and that if I accept them I shall become faithless. No man can be self-sufficing. Human reason is not the supreme law. To render a hearty obedience to the faith is the chief need of the human heart. I have faith, and therefore I am a Christian; but that is not enough. I must hold by every word of Jesus, and then I shall of necessity be a Catholic.

For Jesus unmistakably founded a teaching Church, when He said, "Go and teach all nations": a law-making Church, when He said, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven": and He promised the abiding presence in her of the Holy Spirit, when He said, "I have prayed that thy faith fail not."

'As a Catholic I cannot disobey without rebellion against Jesus: "He that despiseth you despiseth Me." Neither can I as a Catholic escape the sacred and irrevocable vows that I have taken upon me, for I am a priest for ever. Yes, priest. *I am a priest.* You know it, and I also know it. How, then, could we have brought ourselves to think that I could take back from God my pledged word? No, I am bound to something other than to live Christianly in the world. I am destined for sacrifice. My life is no longer my own, and therefore it is beyond my power to dispose of it by giving myself to you in marriage.

'I have acted the part of a perjured traitor. That is why I now am breaking your heart, my poor dear love, and am myself enduring all the agonies of death, under the approving eye of Jesus. But "He who loseth his life for My sake shall find it," and shall save his soul alive.

'Do as I am doing. Cast yourself at the feet of the dear Saviour, and say to Him: "No, my Jesus, he is not lost through me, since he is with Thee; and I also would be with Thee, that we may still be one in Thee. My husband crushes down the human love of his heart, and tramples it under foot for conscience' sake. He renounces self; he takes up his cross to follow Thee. Thou gavest him to me, and Thou hast taken him away: blessed be Thy Holy Name!"

'The wrench will be terrible for you, and I know that words have no power to comfort in such an extremity. I also have to cast myself upon the Divine Master's breast,

life's burden is so great in this laceration of my whole being. We must all die. Death one day must separate us. We are merely anticipating that separation. What are days or years in comparison with the eternity in which we hope to be blessed, eternally blessed, and how can we expect such a blessed future to be ours unless we are physically separated here? But it will not be a total separation. God will allow us to enjoy communion of soul in communion with Him. We will pray for one another, and we will look forward to being united, after a time, in heaven, never more to part. From to-day onwards I make my life one long sacrifice for you—for your eternal welfare and salvation.

'Let me confess it: with my heart so troubled as it is now, I could not make you really happy; and our life together might possibly become a torment for us both, notwithstanding all I could do.

'I have perfect confidence that Jesus, into whose hands I commit you in my complete sacrifice of myself, will give you the blessing of peace in the patient waiting for the future, if you surrender yourself wholly to Him. Forgive me in thinking of my love for you, and of what I am suffering. Your people will also forgive me, when they understand that I cannot go against my conscience. Forgive me, and beseech Jesus Christ to give you courage and light. Forgive! for you would not have me damned, else your love for me would be mere selfishness. I am obeying the dictates of my conscience; God will accept and bless my sacrifice, and the salvation of our souls will then be assured. Oh, how I suffer! But my hope is fixed on high, because I have kept my faith—The Faith.

'With tears, and with all my heart I write:

'We shall meet again in heaven!

'CHARLES FLEURY.'

The Abbé posted that letter, which he had well bedewed with his tears, in the office in Bac Street, and the same evening, armed with a second-class ticket to New York, he took the Havre train at the station of St. Lazare. The *Bourgogne* was getting up steam. With a feeling of deadness in his soul, the Abbé clambered up the gangway, and once on the deck of the packet he was already out of France. To carry through this voluntary self-sacrifice called for all the strength of will of which he was capable. He was about to leave behind, away there at Marville, her whom he most loved in the world, weeping tears of grief and distress at his cruel abandonment of her. Doubtless he should never see again his native place of Loirolles; nevermore should he visit the grave in which his loved ones lay.

He went down into his cabin to hide the tears that, in spite of his utmost efforts at self-control, welled up from his heart. For one moment he had a thought of snatching up his portmanteau and of racing back to catch the returning train, but the artificial conscience, which tortured while it mastered him, cried out that this would be cowardice. Besides, the word of the Lord, so often repeated by Monsieur Balure, came into his mind: 'No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is worthy of Me.' And was not the one and only object of his efforts to avoid falling into hell, and to save his soul alive?

In the solitude of his cabin he kneeled down, and taking up his mother's crucifix, which had never left him, he prayed thus: 'O Lord, I am fulfilling Thy will! Give me the true spirit of sacrifice. I present as an offering to Thee the anguish of this martyrdom that I am enduring for the expiation of my sin. Grant me pardon and peace.' Then at the last moment he wrote a line to Monsieur Balure: 'I go with a broken heart, and without any taste as yet of

that peace which you led me to expect. I am following your advice and guidance. If I am deceived, the responsibility before God rests upon you, by your own admission. Remember what you have promised with respect to her whom, in the name of duty, you have made me abandon.'

The supreme moment came. The anchor is weighed, and the vessel sweeps majestically out towards the ocean. The heart of the fugitive dies within him, brayed in life's mortar. God alone knows what the Abbé suffered on that long nine days' crossing. He cannot even think of those painful days, long past, without a contraction at the heart. As long as he could discern the coast of France, he stood on the deck with his eyes fixed despairingly on the receding shore, where he had left all that he loved on earth. And when all too soon the land disappeared below the horizon, his soulless body collapsed in a prostration so utter and complete as to efface even the power of thought. The first part of the voyage was a time of utter despondency. Tired out by all that he had gone through, his mind was limp and sluggish. The triumph of the will by obedience, and in obedience, appears to have been obtained by nothing less than a total disorganization of his whole inner being. However, by degrees there came a reaction, but only to recall him to a life of supersensitiveness to his misfortunes. The isolation upon which he had entered was most depressing. The immensity of the ocean weighed heavily upon his spirits; and across the Abbé's mind there stole the thought that his soul might, after all, never reach the haven of peace. For certainly he had as yet felt no sense of peace. He could not shut his ears to a voice which murmured at first very faintly, but which grew louder and louder: 'No, you have not done well. No man has the right to separate those whom God has made one.' And another voice, coming as from the depths of his soul, insisted likewise

in a tone that waxed daily more imperious: 'Think of the poor child you have deserted. You love her, and she loves you; how can you live apart?'

After an uneventful voyage, the *Bourgogne* arrived at New York. Immediately on disembarking the Abbé drove to a religious community in the city, where he was expected. The evening of the next day he started off by train from the Great Central Depot, and after a six hours' journey arrived at Realmont. Thence he sailed up the St. Lawrence on board the *Sovereign*, then up the Ottawa River, and at last a country cart took him by a primitive track into the interior, that had aforetime been the home of the Algonquins and the Iroquois. The Trappist Monastery of Como then closed its sombre portals behind poor Abbé Fleury.

This long and rapid journey had completely exhausted him. He had passed through scenery which at any other time would have enchanted him, but his mind, racked and distorted as it was by his sufferings, was at present quite insensible of, and irresponsive to, its charm. He consequently arrived at the end of his pilgrimage a physical and a moral wreck. What days were these that he spent at the *ultima thule* of the world's civilization, and how full they were of grief and pain!

The monks treated him with every consideration and attention. In the presence of one so bowed by grief, they involuntarily exhibited a kind of pity. He was indeed stricken down by sorrow. It fed upon his heart like a devouring fire. The evil was deep-seated. As never before he loved her whom he had been induced to desert, and his grief was nourished and renewed by feeding upon itself. He did all he could to forget, but oblivion came not. To remember was life, and he began to nurse a regret that was soon to be followed by remorse. The arguments by which they tried to cure him were blunted

before they reached his mind, and proved powerless. He rejected them as hollow and vain, for they failed to bring peace. He tried to obtain self-mastery by prolonged fastings, by flagellations, by the incessant repetition of prayers. But the monotony of the litany[1] left him still in his distress, and cruel bodily chastisement was without effect.

Little by little a natural, although rudimentary, conscience took its stand beside, and in opposition to, the distorted conscience of his education, and condemned him for his flight and desertion of her whom he had married in the sight of God. In growing measure, and without his being cognisant of it, the Abbé's mind took less account of every positive aspect of religion.[2] Natural duties, such as are dictated by reason, gradually became imperative and irresistible. To be faithful to the troth plighted to his wife, whatever might be the commandments and doctrines of men, imposed itself upon him as a primary and fundamental duty. And the Abbé's heart pleaded on the same side as his natural conscience, for he loved with his whole soul. He was awaking to the full recognition of the fact that his sudden departure might have brought unlooked-for consequences upon his wife, and in the uncertainty of the possible catastrophes that might have ensued for her whom he had left behind he writhed in agony, and his love and misery became more and more intensified. In proportion as this sense of natural duty took possession of him, so did his broken-hearted regrets change into remorse. He had done wrong. The law that decreed such a separation was

[1] 'O St. Philip, have mercy ;
O St. Anne, have mercy ;'
and so on for a couple of hundred saints and angels.

[2] 'Pure religion and undefiled . . . is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. . . .' 'Religion'=outward acts of worship.

not of God, but was merely of human creation. Those who had advised him had doubtless done so with full honesty of purpose, but their error was nevertheless a radical one. And if a sin had been committed, was it not remediable? Was there any binding necessity that the Abbé should be condemned to remain permanently cooped up in this prison-house of the Trappists with his remorse, and to die there in despair? Certainly not. He would leave. He would retrace his errant steps, he would go and throw himself at the feet of the forsaken one, and plead for forgiveness.

The Abbé did not come to this decision at once. It was a long time before he finally made up his mind to that decision. His newly awakened natural conscience developed slowly. At length one day he resolved to confront the difficulties of the long return journey, and apprised the Superior of the monastery of his intention to leave. He had, of course, to endure a tempest of reproaches and anathemas; nevertheless, he crossed the threshold of his prison-house, and turned his back on it for ever.

CHAPTER XIV

THE TURNING-POINT

IT is not a simple matter to get back to Marville from the backwoods of America. The Abbé, fortunately, had not spent all the money that had been given him when he left Paris. Possibly they had thought that he might try to drown his sorrow by seeking the distractions which money could procure; but the Abbé had spent no more than was necessary, and well it was that he had been so inclined, or, rather, had been so guided by Providence. Before leaving Realmont he sold for four pounds an excellent pair of marine binoculars, which had been presented to him by one of his pupils, and by this means he was enabled to get to New York, and thence to book a third-class passage in the *Touraine* with other returning emigrants.

This journey, also, was not unaccompanied by mental anguish. He tortured himself with all sorts of imaginings as to the state of moral or of physical health in which he should find her whom he had deserted. He had had no news of her since his flight, for Monsieur Balure had expressly forbidden the Abbé to leave the address of the convent to which he was being sent, and he was terribly downcast. So the days dragged their weary hours along

until at length the shores of Europe hove in sight. The liner passed by the Scilly Isles, and on the following night made the port of Havre. On the next day at noon the Abbé was in Paris. He telegraphed to his mother-in-law, and received a reply from Marville. All was forgiven, and they were lovingly awaiting him.

His wife, filled with true Christian fortitude, had tearfully borne up against her trial—in agony of heart indeed, but also in prayer and in hope. Her belief in her husband's goodness and love was still unshaken, and, in spite of everything, she had never lost confidence in him. She understood his doubts and struggles, and freely forgave all. Her love had only grown stronger by her distress. Her health, however, had suffered. It was now August, and her husband took her to the Alps, where the reunited couple spent two months of happiness together. Then he found a situation and settled down to work.

It might well be imagined that, after such an experience, he who had once been Abbé Fleury would now have found peace. For had he not suffered enough? Had he not been called upon to make that hardest of all sacrifices? At first, indeed, there was a kind of quiet in his soul: his natural conscience was at rest; he had repaired the error which reason had stigmatized as a crime. But the religious conscience which his ecclesiastical education had given him was still alive. No sooner did he get to work than it began to trouble him again, and to make another attempt to be master. There could be no rest nor peace of mind for him until it should definitely and finally be overcome. The first step had been taken. Reason and affection had revealed to Abbé Fleury the existence of a natural conscience. And as his naturally religious disposition was constantly in revolt against its dictates, it was imperative that the finishing stroke should

at length be given to that product of his unnatural upbringing and education.

To do this the Abbé would, however, first have to turn his back upon himself, as well as upon man; for it is by the Gospel alone that a purely Christian conscience can be formed.

Monsieur Balure, who was heart and soul a priest, was deeply distressed by the complete failure of his carefully-laid plans to save his young friend from himself. The Abbé had at first suspected that this was the case, but when a little later he met the old Director in the street in Marville, he knew it for certain, for he was accosted thus:

'What have you done, you wretched fellow! I threw you a life-belt, and you prefer to drown. Do what you will, God will remember it against you. The remembrance of your priesthood will haunt your own soul, but I will not desert you. In spite of yourself I will save you, and carry you back to the true fold.'

Monsieur Fleury let the old man have his say, for he could not help being touched by this sorrow on the part of one who had for ten years been his friend and spiritual father. However, there were no more interviews. Monsieur Fleury and his wife removed to Paillon, where he had been offered a situation, but a correspondence began again. Letters were at first few and far between, but in a few months they became less general in tone, and more frequent.

Monsieur Fleury was in charge of an important library, where he did a great amount of reading which made a deep and lasting impression on his mind. He no longer troubled himself about the law of celibacy; on that point his opinions were settled, and his conscience at ease. Reason, common-sense, and the teaching of history, showed him that the Church of Rome had grossly overstepped its

bounds, and had acted tyrannically in imposing such a burden in perpetuity. But it was against the whole system of Roman theology that his soul rose in protest. History—but no longer that version of it which had been given to him to study under that name at the Great Seminary—showed him what the primacy and the infallibility of the Pope are worth. The theory of indulgences he could trace from its birth, so, too, that of the Real Presence, and of purgatory, and the doctrine of confessions, which had their origin in the course of the centuries that followed the noble self-sacrificing life of the primitive Church. Wherever he had always been taught to see the handiwork of God he now discovered human interference. Everywhere capriciousness, love of power, and personal motives.

'But,' he said to himself, 'all these beliefs are possibly based on the Gospel;' and then, for the first time in his life, he really read the fourfold narrative, searching for the doctrines, but finding none of them.

From incidental remarks in Monsieur Fleury's letters, Monsieur Balure greatly feared that the mind of him whom he always called 'his poor boy' was losing all its bearings. So one day 'the poor boy' plucked up courage to say plainly that his former beliefs were in total ruin. The old Director had too much experience to make a frontal attack upon the position, and to argue each point separately. He chose rather another method.

'You are your own tempter,' he wrote. 'You are destroying everything in order to find an excuse for your rebellion against the Church. Your heart blinds you. Believe me, if you were to pass several months away from her to whom you have sacrilegiously united yourself, you would think otherwise.'

Then, making his last effort, he tried the effect of imprecation and anathema: 'Woe unto you, unhappy priest, if,

after revolting from the law of the Church, you revolt from the Church's faith. Woe unto you, unhappy priest, guilty already of sacrilege and perjury against the Church, if you abandon the beliefs in which you were brought up. You were made a priest for the salvation of souls ; Satan will make you a heresy-monger for their destruction. Like your Lord, you have been set for the fall and rising again of many in the Church ; if you reject one single article of your Catechism, it will be for their fall.'

Another time he wrote with tenderness : 'I have loved you so, and you are still very dear to me. What would I not give to save you—to save you from yourself? What you describe as the conclusions to which your studies have brought you are mere Will-o'-the-wisps. Loose yourself from the bonds of your criminal connection [for thus he described a legal union], burst open your prison doors, take refuge in the solitude of a cloister, and one day all will be as clear as daylight before you. Believe in my unchangeable love, and that I am right. You do not see eye to eye with me, because you are living in the sin of sacrilege. Give way to the appeal of my paternal affection.'

For several months longer Abbé Fleury was distracted by uncertainty as to how he ought to act, for he could find no ease of soul while all his beliefs were shaking to pieces, and he could find nothing to take their place. This moral torment perforce affected his outer life. Occasionally he would be invaded by a deep sadness which made him morose. The constant anxiety that afflicted his mind made him hard to please. He was unbearable to himself, and felt that he was an infliction upon others. Sometimes, often indeed, his thoughts would wander from the conversation in which he was engaged, and he would become absent-minded. He lived in the presence of his double. Which of the two was the real self? The automaton who

performed the functions of material existence, or the moral being loosed from all anchorage, floating helplessly upon a sea of doubt? Such a life could not long continue. Moreover, he had to bear it alone. He could not tell anyone about those dismal and mournful imaginings of his inner self. And all the while Monsieur Balure kept saying:

'If you lose the Catholic faith, you will be past hoping for: the end will have come. You will have pursued that road to the abyss from beyond whose brink there can be no return. I implore you for the sake of your eternal salvation to enter a convent. Go and meditate in the cloistered solitude, and the truth will shine into your heart with illuminating glory and irresistible power.'

In the meantime he had heard of the suicide of a priest whom he had once known, who also had lost faith in the Roman Church, and the news appalled him. He did not know that the poor fellow had been ill for a long time, and had committed the act in a state of high fever. Friends inundated him with Roman Catholic newspapers, which described the unhappy event as a Divine judgment.

'You may thus see,' these friends wrote, 'that God does punish apostasy, and yours will be a like fate if you carry your unbelief so far as to become a heretic. That wretch had publicly treated his beliefs as so much dirt, he had denied the true Church in broad daylight, and his chastisement is a solemn lesson which may be a warning to you.'

The next day Monsieur Fleury received another communication which ran thus: 'He was struck down by remorse, a remorse as despairing as that of Judas. He saw his crime as one for which there could be no forgiveness, as did Judas. . . . If you forsake the Church, remorse will one day take root in your heart also, to your ever-

lasting torment. . . . Would you make an end like Judas?'

Monsieur Fleury, who was very impressionable, was deeply affected by all this, and one evening his agony of mind broke forth in his young wife's presence, in uncontrollable groans, tears, and sobs. 'My poor dear,' he said, 'this is nothing new: I have been in this dreadful misery a long time. I have no peace. Something I cannot explain is weighing me down, and causing me insupportable wretchedness. I know not where the truth lies. I cannot go on living in this nightmare any longer. I *must* find peace.'

The poor young thing began to cry, and wailed out: 'Are you going to leave me again? Well, you may go if you like; God will bring you back again.'

And he replied: 'No; I will never desert you again. My first duty is to you. This concerns my beliefs. I feel shaken and uncertain about everything, and I have been told that it is diabolic delusion, that my heart has got into my head and troubles it, and that away from you I shall see clearly.'

'Oh, my God! What an unfortunate woman I am!' was all the poor wife could say.

That day, therefore, Monsieur Fleury let the subject drop, but they kneeled down together in their humble little room, and prayed. She, good, true Christian that she was, prayed to the Heavenly Father with a heart filled with sadness, but full of trust. He, to whom the Fatherhood of God had not yet been revealed, besought an avenging Deity to spare him, and not to smite him with death, as a slave might do at the feet of his master! Neither could sleep that night—the one for sorrow, the other for the agony of terror.

'What do you think of doing?' said his young wife next

morning. And Monsieur Fleury plucked up all his courage, and replied: 'You see, my dear love, this state of things must be made an end of. I have no desire to be damned, and to obtain peace of soul I must know the truth. It seems to me pretty certain that the truth does not rest with the Church of Rome. But as I am told that, if I lose my beliefs, it will be because I insist on continuing to live with you, who are a Protestant, I would like to try the effect of the method which they all tell me is infallible. Are you willing to allow me to go into Retreat, there to hold converse with God face to face?'

As I have already said, Madame Fleury had the brave and confident heart of a true Christian. However, her first impulse was to exclaim in alarm: 'But if you go away, will you come back to me again? Will they not shut you up, and keep you prisoner?' Then, collecting herself quickly, she added, her eyes brimming over with great tears: 'Go; I trust you, and, above all, God. You are unhappy; you are troubled by doubts: go and find peace. God will bring you back again.'

For a long time they remained weeping together in silence, her hand in his. They were both of one mind, that this sacrifice ought to be made for God and for peace of mind. But a sacrifice is always a sacrifice, and it must always be accompanied by suffering, because human nature is always human nature.

Monsieur Fleury had a friend in Paillon, a man somewhat advanced in years, and full of common-sense and experience. He went to this friend and acquainted him in a few words with his trouble, and how he purposed to seek relief from it. His friend said:

'I know little about such troubles of conscience as yours; but since it affects your peace of mind, and since you are acting from a sense of loyalty to yourself, perhaps

there would be an advantage in making trial of the experience. You are too intelligent and too sincere for it to be other than short, and helpful to you.'

On the morrow Monsieur Fleury wrote to his mother-in-law, who had been made privy to his moral difficulties. She was a good Christian woman.

'DEAR MOTHER,

'After much prayer and reflection, my wife and I have decided that it will be best for me to make trial of the "separation test," in order that I may look clearly into my conscience, and learn at last where is the very truth. It is, in my opinion, the only means left to me of making an end of these continual changes of mind, and of these fits of mental depression, that are making both our lives wretched. Do not be annoyed with me. Look only at our sincere desire to do right, and believe that by this arrangement we are proving our loyal trust in God. No happiness is possible for us unless I can attain to peace of conscience. If I remain in my present state, I shall not only myself continue to suffer, but I shall be a constant source of suffering to my wife. I look to this effort as our last resource. May God bless you. May you bless me also, and let us all go forward together in His strength.'

At the same time Monsieur Fleury's wife wrote this admirable letter:

'DEAR MOTHER,

'This is what my husband and I have decided to do. God requires this much at our hands. Did He not demand of Abraham the sacrifice of his son? Will He do for us as He did for him? Seeing that we are acting in all sincerity, will He give us rest and peace? You know that I gave myself to Him when I was quite young, and

that I have ever since loyally tried to serve Him. May He not now expect me to consecrate myself more wholly to His service? It will be well worth while to make this trial, for I see God's hand in it. We have prayed about it. What is the world, my dearest mother? It is nothing. We shall all pray constantly, and God will look on us with favour; so by our faithfulness to Him and our faith in Him we shall win for Him the soul of the prodigal son.

'I shall work here with my sister during the time the proposed test lasts. I implore you not to hinder the work of God. Pray with Charles and encourage him. Why fight against conscience? He is in earnest; let him fulfil the will of God. I love him more than myself, but less than God. Who knows if, after the trial is over, and Charles feels assured of the Divine approval, God will not reunite us to do work in the world for Him? Come, let us be brave and strong of heart, and not give way. Let us prove that we are able to make a small sacrifice for Him who has made so great a sacrifice for us.

'I await my sister, and continue to pray earnestly meanwhile. Send her at once; her life with me will be quite happy and peaceful. Once more, do not hinder our purpose, and let things take their course according to the will of God. I am in great sorrow, it is true, but I feel that Jesus is near.'

All was soon arranged for his departure, and the sad day of separation, with its attendant tears, arrived. Their last act together was a united prayer mingled with sobs: then a friend came for Madame Fleury; and once alone, Monsieur Fleury, who was suffering so keenly himself, and was giving so much suffering to others in his search after truth and peace, wrote the following lines before starting to catch the train that was to take him away:

'My dear Wife,

'While the carriage is carrying you off to your friend's house, I remain within doors to hide my distress. We feel it greatly, do we not, you and I, silently in the depths of our hearts? But, as you wrote to your mother, let us be strong of heart, and not think too much about ourselves, but only of God. He it is who inspires, and He who consoles. Oh that He would sweeten the bitterness of our hearts, that He would dry our scalding tears! He is so just. He sees the sincerity of our hearts, and He will give us our reward because He is faithful. Let us act solely as in His sight; then will He give us the desire of our hearts.

'Come, let us be brave! Couples often consent to live apart for long periods in order to gain some pecuniary advantage. We, on the other hand, do it that we may draw nearer to God. And the nearer we draw to Him, the more fully will He enlighten us.

'Your sister is coming, so you will be neither lonely nor dull. You are very fond of her, she is such a good Christian. No doubt you will cry together sometimes, but you will also pray together, and the mighty God will support you by His grace. You and I shall have spiritual communion before His throne, and if it is His holy will, He will unite us again to work together for His glory. I love you more than ever for this beautiful sacrifice you are making for your faith and for my peace of conscience. I do not sorrow as one without hope, so I will be brave and trust in God.'

And Monsieur Fleury left for the Monastery of Nansèques, into which Monsieur Balure had long ago made certain he would be received.

CHAPTER XV

IN THE CONVENT

THE rule of the Convent of Nansèques is tolerably severe. The manner of life of the monks is somewhere between that of La Trappe and that of Chartreux. They go to bed at nine o'clock, and rise at three in the morning. The greater portion of the early hours of the day is occupied in religious exercises and in the chanting of the Office. The rest of the morning is allotted to intellectual work, and the afternoon hours to work in the fields. The diet is of the scantiest—Lenten fare every day except Sunday. At the mid-day meal there is soup, followed by one helping of some light food and a few hazel-nuts. At the evening meal nothing but soup and a few dried figs is provided. Moreover, absolute silence is enjoined, except for one hour on Sunday. Each monk has a cell to himself. So the rule is severe enough, but on the whole it is not too trying for anyone in ordinary health. Monsieur Fleury did not find it unbearable, because little restriction was laid upon his movements. However, there he was, at the bottom of the desolate valley, hollowed out between two bare and almost precipitous slopes, as in a silent grave. The Abbot of the monastery was a good and very devout man. Monsieur Fleury passed his first days there in an almost unbroken silence. For hours he crouched

in the niche of a pillar under the shadow of the old chapel; and although he repeated many prayers, joy came not, the promised peace illuded him. When he expressed a desire to lay his doubts before the Abbot, that holy man was at first unwilling to listen, saying: 'Why should we argue? Pray and forget.' But the human mind is rebellious, and must have something to attach itself to, nor can it rest content with a shadowy mysticism. The soul troubled by doubt returns again to the swept and garnished house. He had come to this place in blind obedience to superior authority. His will had indeed been bent, but it had not been broken. What he saw of this monastic, unsocial life appeared to him at first to be absurd, self-centred, and useless, and he could not help saying to himself, 'Is this slavish life really the Christian life? Is this mechanical thing the Christian religion? Is this entire self-abdication all that is required of man? What benefit can accrue, either to God or to the soul of man, from the loss of necessary sleep, from prison fare, from a sullen silence as that of the lower creation? We are not directed in the New Testament to follow such a life; besides, such a life is rarely found among Christians outside the Church of Rome.'

Monsieur Balure had urged Monsieur Fleury to shut himself up in a monastery, trusting to the effect of the silent working of his conscience. 'There, and there only,' he had said, 'you will have the peace which now flies you.' But the erstwhile Abbé found not peace, because his mind, so far from being prevailed upon to humble itself and to make an entire and eternal capitulation, uprose in all its native power, and protested actively against such a forfeit.

'You think too much,' said the Abbot. 'If you repudiate the authority of the Church, you lose faith. If you allow everything to fall to pieces in your soul, what can you find

to take the place of the ideal of truth in which you have been brought up?'

It cannot be denied that Monsieur Fleury was dismayed at the prospect of the ruin of his shattered belief. But the revolution, which at first had been growing unnoticed, had at last finished its secret work and was complete. The former creeds had been blown into fragments, and one day Monsieur Fleury, in his agitation and distress, gave vent to this cry of sad conviction: 'My Father, what is the good of trying to deceive myself? I no longer hold the faith of the Church of Rome.'

The old monk made no reply, but great tears rolled down his hollow cheeks. Then, taking the young man by the hand, he said: 'Let us go to the chapel.' The ancient sanctuary was deserted and silent. The Abbot of Nansèques prostrated himself in the middle of the chancel, and lay for many minutes stretched out there like a dead man, with his face pressed upon the flagstones, absorbed, no doubt, in prayer. The Abbé was deeply touched. He was no sceptic, unable to see more in this act than a theatrical exhibition. It pained him deeply to watch a man suffer who had shown him nothing but kindness and goodwill. At length the Abbot arose, pressed him to his heart, and left him, saying that on the morrow he would take him to Notre-Dame-des-Clartés.

So the next morning they started off together for the holy place dear to the hearts of the people of Provence. Notre-Dame-des-Clartés is a much-frequented place of pilgimage. As they travelled, Monsieur Fleury attempted to open a conversation, but the Abbot only said quietly: 'Let us pray. The Blessed Virgin is about to work in you a great miracle.'

We cannot withhold admiration from the simple sincerity of the old man's confidence, although it was compounded

with even more superstition than was the faith of her who believed there was virtue in the tassel of Christ's cloak. The miracle was not performed on Monsieur Fleury. He even found it difficult not to smile when one of the Fathers of Notre-Dame-des-Clartés said to a group of pilgrims that had just arrived: 'Our pilgrimage is a real "sacrament."' Was not that as much as if he had said, 'To come to this place is in itself a saving power. There is in the air we breathe at Notre-Dame-des-Clartés, as it were, a magical force which acts upon you in spite of yourself'?[1] What could be falser morality or grosser superstition?

The return journey was less silent. 'Why do you no longer believe in the Blessed Virgin?' the Abbot questioned.

'Do you wish me to be quite frank, my Father?'

'Yes, tell me what you think.'

'Well, then, this is what I think: The Church, as has been said, has invented an all-powerful intercessor between God and man. Far be it from me to wish to blaspheme, but the truth is before all. Mary is blessed above all women, the Gospel tells us. But from the Gospel we also learn that she had need of grace, or why should there be a call for an immaculate conception? The Gospel tells us that God exalted her humility; why, then, speak of her sinlessness? And, further, even if Mary were as privileged as is supposed, she is still but a creature. Why, therefore, offer her worship? Men flock to holy places built in honour of a creature. Thousands of candles are burnt in her honour. Flowers are strewed at her feet, and incense is offered at her shrine. Of whom are they always extolling the praises, but of a creature? Before a creature they kneel, and to a creature they address their prayers.'

[1] Perhaps his audience thus interpreted the expression.

'But,' interposed the Abbot, 'what are you trying to prove by all this?'

'This, my Father: the religion which dethrones the Master—which, at any rate, practically dethrones Him, when it leads multitudes to bow to the image of a created being—that religion may be whatever you like to call it (I should be inclined to call it paganism), but it can never be the religion of the Gospel.'

The Abbot of Nansèques was astounded. 'You unhappy wretch!' he exclaimed; 'you are a lost soul, for you have rejected our Divine Mother.'

'Ah, my Father! that is by no means all. If I could tell you all the conclusions at which I have arrived, you would consider the matter still more serious, but you would never be willing to hear me out.'

'I will hear you, nevertheless,' replied the Abbot. 'Perhaps I might be able to point out where you are in error.'

In the evening of the same day, after their return to the monastery, the Abbot and Monsieur Fleury met by appointment on the outskirts of the little wood of Nansèques. There was an old oak there from whose branches the Baron des Adrets was said to have once hung eighteen monks. Under its shadow they took their seat.

After the Abbot had said the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Come Holy Ghost, our souls inspire), Monsieur Fleury began by saying: 'You know as well as I do, my Father, how the Church has varied during the formation of her doctrines.'

'The Church has never varied, my son.'

'Begging your pardon, we are to-day face to face with the manner in which a doctrine is formed.'

'Indeed! I am curious to know to what doctrine you refer.'

'Why, to the doctrine of the Assumption. The Church has seized upon a legend which she says is authenticated by oral tradition. Christ has His ascension, and His mother should have her assumption. She ought now to be in heaven both in soul and in body. And note, my Father, that this belief has not yet been made a part of the faith. It is still subject to free discussion. You may to-day conscientiously accept it, or reject it, without ceasing to be in communion with the Church. But a day will come when the Pope will pronounce, with an assumption of infallibility, that the story is true, and so what to-day one may reject without any danger of losing heaven one will then no longer be able to reject without incurring a danger of hell-fire. So you see, my Father, there are changes in the articles of belief and in the conditions of salvation. Nor is that all. The worship of saints seems to me to be contrary to the commandment which says: "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me."

'Our whole soul ought to be turned to our Father—that is, God. All the energies of our soul are not much to render Him due worship, and yet we fritter them away in numberless devotions offered to created beings like ourselves. Would an earthly King look with the eye of favour upon subjects who payed homage to others less powerful than himself? How would a father feel whose children passed him over to ask for aid and protection of others less loving than he?

'And, then, is it not rather rash, to say the least? Who on earth has ever been able to read all that is in a man's heart? Who has ever been privy to his most secret thoughts? who to his dearest longings? Who is there, be he Pope even, who has wisdom enough to affirm with certainty that a man has really and truly lived and died in the love of God? There are semblances of holiness, I

readily admit; there is probability, I allow; but I want certainty, and no man on earth can give it me.

'Lastly, I go further still. I will suppose that a man is dead, saved from sin. Even so, is it not hazardous to offer him worship? Who knows for certain that he can hear the voice of my prayer, that he can see my outstretched hands, that he can read the dumb supplications of my heart? What authority have I to ascribe such omniscience to the saints? Nothing in the New Testament touches the subject, even remotely.'

'Nevertheless,' the Abbot interjected, 'do you not believe that the images of the saints influence people for good?'

'I admit, my Father, that beautiful pictures which reproduce scenes of our Blessed Lord's life are able to uplift the soul. I am no mad iconoclast. But my reason disapproves of the Church turning her places of worship into representations of Olympus, into Pantheons. In almost every church the cross over the altar is dwarfed by some male or female saint, and, consequently, the heart cannot concentrate its adoration. You know well that I am not exaggerating. You know better than I do that no devout member of the Church exists who does not place side by side with God in his heart some saint or other. Nor is the sexual element wanting. Men usually invoke a female saint by preference, and women have a leaning towards a male saint; and most people choose one whose character is gentle and lovable. The statues and paintings only represent youthful and clean-shaven figures, clothed in garments such as no saint ever wore when in the flesh. Not many statues are there of the vermin-covered St. Benedict, but everywhere you come across, as we did this morning at Notre-Dame-des-Clartés, representations of the Assumption, wherein the Virgin, who was over sixty years of age when she died, is depicted ascending to heaven

as a lovely young woman. Now would you have me, who harbour these ideas, accept a religion so materialistic, and so closely akin to paganism?

'The greatest error of the Church of Rome seems to me to lie in her theory of salvation. I think, my Father, that I have a copy of the New Testament in my pocket now; let me show you whether I be wrong or not. The Sacrifice of Obedience and Love was completed once for all on Calvary. The gate of the heavenly fold was then opened wide for the lost sheep. The treasure-house of grace, too, is open, and is free to him that asketh. So says the Gospel. It is simple and plain. But has not the Church of Rome surrounded it with difficulty? The required mediation of the Church is well symbolized by the figure of St. Peter as porter at the door of Paradise, with the keys in his hand.

'Then, again, does not the Church declare that it is not enough *to be* saved—you must save yourself? Do good works, and you will thereby work out your own salvation, and thus win heaven. No, no! good works cannot purchase heaven for sinners. We are debtors, but not debtors who shall pass through the bankruptcy court paying a penny in the pound. Our debts were paid in full on Calvary, where a full remission was granted. Repentance is a gift, forgiveness is a gift, and life eternal is a gift. That is what the Gospel declares. My personal salvation is a matter between God and my own soul.[1] The Church can neither insure it to me nor take it from me.'

'Poor boy,' sighed the Abbot, 'if you only could abide by the teaching of the Church, how much happier you would be, and how much more real assurance you would have.'

'Even now, my Father,' the young man went on

[1] This is a very sweeping statement, that might easily convey a wrong impression of the truth.

unabashed, 'you seem to set the Pope above Jesus Christ. The Pope has been made the Vicar of Christ on earth. Surely that is a sufficiently exorbitant extortion. For if I open the New Testament, I see that Peter, the predecessor of the Pope, denied his Master with an oath, on the same day on which Judas betrayed Him. In the Acts I find the Apostle Paul openly reproving this first Vicar of Christ for his ill-timed weakness, *because he was blameworthy*. A few pages further on, at the Council of Jerusalem, it is not he to whom the keys of death and of hell were given who presides, but St. James. I continue my reading, and search in vain, even in St. Peter's own letters, for a trace of any primacy. Was it, then, a gradual usurpation? Have you not noticed in Church history that the Papacy is the result of overcentralization? Did not the Pope become supreme ruler of the Church only because of the pride and tenacity of the Bishop of Rome, and because of the weak sycophancy of the other Bishops?

'The Papacy has no place in the New Testament; and usurped power intoxicates like strong wine. And when once the Pope had attained to domination over his fellow-Bishops, who were his peers, he pressed onward to impose his authority likewise upon the souls of all Christians, his brethren in Jesus Christ. Like Prometheus, he seeks to steal fire from heaven; he claims an attribute of Divinity when he declares himself to be infallible.

'Forgive me, my Father, if I give way to righteous indignation. But common-sense tells me that it is logically absurd as well as sacrilegious. The Holy Scriptures are silent as to any such privilege as that claimed to-day by him with such effrontery; while, does not history placard in letters of fire a record of the doctrinal, political, and other errors of his predecessors?'

A painful silence of a few minutes followed this ebullition

of feeling on the part of Monsieur Fleury; then he continued:

'You know, my Father, that I have been greatly troubled in conscience. I have put God and my own salvation before every other consideration. I see to-day that my sufferings were so keen just because my conscience was perverted, and enslaved to Church tyranny. I bear no ill-will to Monsieur Balure, notwithstanding all he has forced me to go through, because I know him to be sincere, and animated by a feeling of true friendship for me. The Church has made him what he is. The Church is a perverter of conscience, for she professes to change the nature of things in her desire to invent wrong-doing by her commandments, and sins by her prohibitions.

'Amongst other things, the Church makes it obligatory to be present at Mass on certain days, counting omission a sin.[1] What could be better than for sinners to gather together on certain days for prayer to God? But to pray in the solitude of one's closet, to the God who seeth in secret, is good likewise. To pray at any hour of the day is good; but that it should be essentially wrong not to pray on a certain fixed day, or in a particular place, neither my reason nor my conscience can grasp. And we, who know how the great majority of Roman Catholics observe that command, can see that it occasions positive irreverence before God. Of what benefit is the Mass to people where the most solemn and important things that fill their minds and occupy their attention are the incomprehensible comings and goings of the celebrant, the bell-ringings of the servers, and, it may as well be said, the coming round of the Vicar with the bag. I ask you, is the presence at

[1] Six commandments of the Church are counted as binding as are the Ten Words. So of the Jew who was not circumcized, and of him who did not eat of the passover, that soul was cut off from the chosen people.

Mass, in the case of most people, in any sense to be classed amongst "good deeds"? They come to church, but their minds either have remained at the door or wander far from the precincts of the sanctuary. However, they have gone through the form. They have not outwardly disobeyed the Church, and so they have avoided a mortal sin. The whole thing would be laughable, were it not so sad; and the same may be said of the annual Confession before the Easter Communion.'

'And what conclusion do you draw from all that? Are you not speaking ironically?' asked the Abbot.

'No, my Father, it is not only irony. For suppose that a Catholic enters into the celebration of the Mass with all his heart, and suppose that at Easter he rightly makes both his Confession and Communion, how can that prove that *not* to pray at such and such an hour, *not* to be present at such an act of worship, is to commit sin? How can it prove that *not* to confess at a special period, *not* to communicate on a fixed day, must be condemned by the conscience as sinful omissions of duty? And so, too, in the case of ecclesiastical prohibitions. What is there essentially wrong in having three meals on any day of the week, or at any time of the year? Wherein does the natural conscience of man revolt against eating meat every day of the week? It is a matter of hygiene, and has nothing to do with religion. So, my Father, there seems to me to be evidence that the Church by her laws perverts the conscience. And, further, I say that the Church blinds the conscience by her casuistry and mental reservations. You know as well as I do what are our theological theories. What is permitted or forbidden is a question of arithmetic. The number of theologians on the one side being greater than the number on the other decides what is the moral law. But worse than that, what is allowed or forbidden is at the mercy of the

feeling of one theologian : for an opinion sufficiently probable may establish a moral law. Lastly, the Church which perverts and blinds the conscience claims also to rule it. Its great aim is to keep the souls of men in perpetual tutelage. Is that according to the Gospel? Jesus Christ gave no other moral commandments save the decalogue of Moses, which was based upon the needs and tendencies of the human nature God created in mankind. The only new revelation our Lord brought to bear upon the Ten Commandments being, that whereas in ancient times obedience to them was enforced by fear, He laid down that true observance of the law of God could only be secured by love.[1] The sense of right and wrong as expressed in these commandments is written on my natural conscience,[2] and my natural conscience is God's voice within me.

'Then take Confession. Whence came it? That our Lord Jesus Christ did not institute auricular Confession is incontestable. The public Confession made to God, so impressive in the first ages, has become a weapon, and the means to an end. On the pretext of saving the sinner's self-respect, the clergy changed this public act into a private avowal, and thus they became masters of the souls of men. Auricular Confession is a human institution. The dangers of secret Confession are known to you. Should anything which can lead even a few souls to perdition be tolerated? We have verified the practical uselessness of Confession. Whether desiring it or not, the Church, by making out Confession to be a returning to God, rather than laying stress on true repentance of heart, is chiefly preoccupied with every little outward manifestation in dealing with sin, and scarcely glances at the infinite greatness of Divine Love. It is all a matter of routine. How many hearts have been

[1] 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments' (St. John xv. 10).
[2] His natural conscience had then been well instructed.—*Trans.*

changed by Confession of this kind? But however many advantages there may be in Confession when it emanates from true repentance, it also has its dangers.'

'You will grant the virtue of the Holy Communion, surely?' exclaimed the Abbot.

'Alas, my Father! I must be sincere throughout. It appears to me that the worship of the Church, stately as it is, is a worship that is without life or truth. I will say nothing of hymns that are in bad taste, wherein man addresses God, Mary, and the saints in misplaced words of human passion. You yourself deplore it, as you one day told me. But why should an unknown tongue be used in the worship, a melodious tongue though it be? What has melody to do with the drawing near of the soul to God? It is hard enough to concentrate one's thoughts in order to place one's self consciously in God's presence; why, then, use a language in worship which awakens no response in the mind? Whom does it deceive? Surely not God, whom the Church makes its votaries to address in words that to them are devoid of meaning? It must, then, be the poor worshippers who are thus led to imagine that they are addressing God with words of magic power which will make Heaven propitious. My Father, shall I tell you what I think about the service of the Mass? I have only to set the statements of the Catechism side by side with the words of the Gospel.

'According to the Catechism, the Mass is the sacrifice of the human body and blood of Jesus Christ, offered up to God in the elements of bread and wine, by the priestly ministrant. But nowhere in the Gospels did Jesus institute any such sacrifice, nor is there ever any mention made of it in the early ages of the Church. The Lord's Supper was not a material sacrifice, else to what end was the Sacrifice of Calvary?'

'What, then, does the Lord's Supper mean to you?' questioned the Abbot.

'It appears to me, resting on the words themselves, "This do in remembrance of Me," that the Supper is a symbolic feast, by which our Blessed Lord desired to perpetuate the memory of His continued presence amongst His disciples. In the infancy of the Church this thought was thoroughly exemplified in the Agape. It was man who turned the Lord's institution into a sacrifice. And in practice you know how the majority of Roman Catholic laity[1] have come to regard the Sacrifice of the Mass; how in ever-increasing numbers they smile at it, and how many are present as onlookers merely. For it is a gorgeous scene to assist at—a stately and interesting ceremony to watch. So they look on, fascinated more or less by the pomp and ceremony, and it serves to pass the time as a show. Unhappily, it is to the majority but an empty and hollow show, quite devoid of meaning. The knees bend, the head is bowed, but the soul remains untouched and irresponsive. Can any quickening or life be drawn from such formalism? And this is the conclusion I have come to, my Father. The Church teaches, and imposes as truths that must be accepted under threat of damnation, doctrines which are not in the Gospels. The Church does not teach the simple morality of the Gospels. The Church is pagan in her worship, quite contrary to the whole spirit of the Gospel.'

'My poor lad,' groaned the Abbot, 'I do not know by what name to call you after such denials.'

'My Father, why consider propriety?'

'Well, then, you have actually been speaking like a Protestant.'

'If a Protestant is a Christian according to the New Testament,' Monsieur Fleury replied calmly, 'the name will

[1] In France?

not affright me. Religion is not a question of classification, but religion is the bond which unites man to God, and in Christianity the bond is Jesus Christ.'

At this moment the monastery bell began to ring for the Office. The Abbot was obliged to be present, and he looked very sad as he turned to go, saying: 'I will come to your cell this evening.'

Monsieur Fleury did not go in to supper. He retired instead to his cell, where he kneeled down, and alone with God he spent the most solemn hours of his life.

When, at about ten o'clock, the Abbot of Nansèques entered the cell, he found the young man on his knees. 'You have been weeping, my son,' he remarked gently.

'Indeed I have,' Monsieur Fleury replied. 'At first my tears were tears of bitterness, but afterwards they were tears of joy.'

'Has, then, "Our Lady of Illumination" worked a miracle, after all? Did she suffer you to go down into the abyss of heresy in order that she might save you the more effectually?'

'You are half right, my Father. A miracle has indeed been worked, but not the kind of miracle you imagine. I see—I believe! When I felt the void in my soul, I suffered greatly. Then I opened this Book, impelled by some mysterious power. I read; God made me to understand. It seemed as if an audible voice were speaking to me.'

'You have been dreaming, my son!'

'Not so, my Father. The heart that is suffering does not fall asleep.'

The Abbot of Nansèques did not press the point, but said: 'Go to bed and sleep; we shall leave all decision for to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW LIFE

THIS is how, a fortnight later, Monsieur Fleury, at the request of his friends, wrote down his impressions of that never-to-be-forgotten evening:

'When the Abbot left me at the Baron's Oak, and I was about to return to the monastery, I found myself quite exhausted by the confession and apology. The love of life was strong within me, and the thought that the wreckage of my dismantled beliefs would be a perpetual incubus on my heart and soul dismayed me. The dread of such a fate was so intense as to force tears to my eyes. But of a sudden light, as it were, came to me. Two wondrous sentences which I had often read in my breviary came before my mind, viz: "Whosoever abideth in Me hath everlasting life," and, "The just shall live by faith." At once all seemed clear. Men had led me into error. I had been under a delusion. The trust that I had placed in men and in myself I should have placed in God alone. Alone with God—God only with me; so that I could give another and a richer application to that expression which is used to glorify the life of cloistered solitude: *O beata solitudo, o sola beatitudo* (O blessed solitude, only beatitude!).

'And God made me to understand that faith, both the quickener and the nourishment of life, could no longer be

for me only a passive adhesion to truths wrapped up in the cerements of human formulæ. In order to become united to God and to live in Him, I no longer required to range dogmas in my mind, like so many mummies on their shelves; and I felt that, life having come to me without human mediation, I should have henceforth but one Master and one Guide, in the full play of my mind, in the free exercise of my will, even God, present in my conscience.

'Then a cry of distress to the Lord Jesus broke from me, as from one whose feet are slipping from under him, and I poured out my soul to Him, and opened my heart wide to the plenteous shower of His grace, giving myself up completely to the all-prevailing love of my Saviour.

'Now I understood that while I had been seeking God and seeking truth God had also been seeking me, and that the faith of the Gospel, which is trust in His love, is naught but a mysterious communion between the soul of man and God. From now onward I barter no slavish acts of duty on my part, for grace to be received in exchange from God, but I give myself body and soul to God, and God fills me with Himself. Henceforth I have burst my leading-strings, I am a free man, because Christ is the only Mediator between God and man. I hold life only in Jesus Christ, and by Jesus Christ, in His Word by which He guided me to life. The true Christian conscience was now born in me. My ecclesiastical conscience had been vanquished by my Christian conscience, which God had Himself developed, and was perfecting. I had no longer to try to find the quietude of peace in human statements, nor to fear that I should be vexed and troubled by threats of damnation. And I can call myself conqueror; for if God be with me, who shall be against me? I shall henceforth take the Gospel for my only rule. I entered this convent to dismiss

the world from my thoughts, to see clearly, and unfettered in mind to come to some definite conclusion on matters of faith. God blessed this loyal effort and the courage that prompted it: I had become a Christian. I rejoiced in the new light that now shone with irresistible brightness in my soul. Upon the ruins of the old Roman citadel in my heart a fortress of truth was now raised. In a word, slavery was ended, and the liberty of the children of God had come. No more for me a cloister prison, but a boundless freedom.'

That night Monsieur Fleury had a quieter sleep than he had enjoyed for a very long time. And he had a dream. He was once more in the Grand Seminary of Bakou, in the Hall for devotions, and he was speaking to the students: 'Put aside your breviary, and take up the New Testament. Your prayers and your life are at present mechanical: live and pray henceforth with the heart. Do not teach the doctrine imposed by the Church of Rome; teach the pure doctrine of Christ. Do not try to make Churchmen, but to make Christians. Be not slaves, but be freemen. Respect conscience above everything. Be not the soldiers of the Pope, but be heralds of the Lord Jesus. Call none your father, nor anyone director: you have but one Father —that is, God—and you have but one Director—that is, Jesus Christ!'

On the next day, when the Abbot of Nansèques entered Monsieur Fleury's cell, he found him fastening up his portmanteau. 'What!' said he, 'are you going away?'

'Yes, my Father, I am going. Now that I possess the truth, and am firmly convinced that, say what men please, I have life if I abide in union with God, what have I to do with this house? I neither can, nor will, nor ought to, remain.'

'Why not put it to the test of time?'

'Because I feel that such a proof is needless. My mind and my conscience have started along a road upon which they will never return.'

'What great sorrow you are about to give Monsieur Balure, and all those who love you!'

'Thanks be to God, my Father! It is better to obey God than men. You know that the gist of all Monsieur Balure's letters is that we must not reason, but must allow ourselves to be guided. Very well, I cannot. I cannot give my will unreservedly into the keeping of another. I am much attached to Monsieur Balure, and he is fond of me. His one desire for me is that I may be saved, and in this he is sincere. But I feel, by the development of the energies of my personality, that the whole duty of a man is not the perpetuation of spiritual infancy, nor an indefinitely prolonged state of tutelage. Still less is it the duty of a Christian. I will be myself, led by God alone.'

'And you are going to join her whom you call your wife?'

'Yes, I am going to rejoin my wife. No man has a right to separate those whom God has made one. I mean to go to her as soon as possible, because she lives in constant fear that I shall never return to her.'

'Unhappy wretch! you forget that you are a priest.'

'No, I do not forget it. I am a priest, and if God wills I shall remain a priest, but not in the sense that you regard it. I shall be no longer a priest who, under the pretext of doing service to God and to human souls, really renders service to a man and to a human organization. I shall no longer be a priest of magic formulæ, nor a fetish priest, nor a priest who conducts shows. I dream of being a herald of the Gospel of Christ. My priestly office will be to proclaim the glad tidings. It will be my constant

endeavour to preach Jesus Christ, and thereby, whatever men may please to think, I shall at least be faithful to my trust.'

'But you are nothing better than a heretic, and you are going to teach erroneous doctrine.'

'Pardon me, but is it heretical to make evangelical truth one's own? And where is the sin of making this truth known in all its simplicity, without any elaborations or superimpositions? I see, my Father, that I have pained you, and you, too, have shown me much kindness. But I cannot say other than what I believe to be truth. Let me now bid you farewell, but not for ever: for we shall meet again. All the radii of a circle meet at the one centre. We are both journeying towards God—you in the company of the saints, and I alone supported by Jesus Christ.'

That same day Monsieur Fleury left the Monastery of Nansèques, but before leaving, to signalize his complete separation from the Church of Rome, he handed over to the Abbot the valuable medal which Monsieur Balure had given him nine years before, on the day of his ordination to the priesthood.

The Father quite understood, for he heaved a great sigh, and said, 'All is over, then?'

'Yes, my father, all is over. A new man is about to begin a new life.'

'Go, and God keep you. And may the blessing of an old man be with you, notwithstanding. I give you my blessing. God is able to save you.'

So Monsieur Fleury left the monastery. With what a light and joyous feeling he climbed the steep path that he had descended a few weeks before with death in his soul! He hardly knew himself. He seemed to have wings. The cold, dead weight which then had oppressed his heart was gone, gone with all those perplexities that then had tortured

his soul. And when he reached the top of the mountain, and saw stretched out before his eyes the fertile plain bathed in glorious light, quivering with life, he felt like a blind man who had just recovered his sight, and his whole being expanded in the conquering sun of the glorious Gospel.

EPILOGUE

THE true story of the moral struggles of Abbé Fleury has been put before the reader. Those who have followed him through the course of this soul's story, have been able to see and feel that the fundamental cause of his vacillation, and of all the miseries that resulted from this uncertainty of mind, was the education to which he had from childhood been subjected, and the substitution of the will of another for the independence of his own moral being. What can *the vocation* mean to a child of eleven years old? By what right, we may ask, are the vague aspirations of childhood thus stereotyped and exploited?

Can a child of eleven years of age rightly understand the meaning of the word 'Church'? Is it made clear to him during the course of his education at the seminary? On the contrary, he is forced, or at all events recommended, to read only what will present an illusion to his mind, and he is strictly forbidden to read anything that could open his eyes to the reality, by the simple directness or clearness of its language on that subject. It is looked upon as a crime, almost sacrilege, for a seminarist to read a book proscribed by the Index. Not that such a book ever comes in his way. Thus, it can hardly fail to result, from such a narrow

and circumscribed education, that a candidate for the priesthood reaches the age of twenty-five, the time of his ordination, without even a conjecture as to what the Church to which he belongs really is. How can he at eleven years of age form an opinion about it? Does he even know at that age what manner of man a priest is? The priest of the altar, the highly-privileged celebrant, with the halo of the sacrificer about him, is what seizes upon his childish imagination. Also during the whole course of his school life every effort has but one aim, even to exhibit the priest in the glory of the Mount of Transfiguration—a sublime mediator between earth and heaven. How can he guess that he is really advancing blindfold in the direction of a complete and most humiliating spiritual bondage? What does the age of eleven know of life? And what can a youth learn of it in the close and narrow confines of a seminary? Nothing at all, or next to nothing. Bewildered by extravagant mysticism, kept apart from the world during the holidays, the seminary student moves onward towards priesthood without a suspicion that Nature will one day proclaim aloud her legitimate rights, and will cause the artificial exaltation of spirit to grow dim from contact with uncompromising reality.

The Directors of seminaries may be able to accustom the conscience of youth to walk on a tight-rope, to subject and confine its mind to one particular method and to dogmatic assertion, and to bend its will to their discipline. But when youth thus bent develops into manhood, what result do they see from their work? Even supposing there be no awakening of primitive instinct, they have only succeeded in producing automatons. And then, if the mechanical action of such an automaton should one day fall to pieces, can a man be reconstructed out of the débris? Vaucanson turned out automatons, but after a fashion he

put life into matter. At a seminary mechanical angels can only be made by chloroforming all that is most alive in a man, namely, his inner moral nature. To this end every means is adopted. A hothouse atmosphere, moral pressure, a subtle course of instruction, devotional exercises, the unintermittent drip of an undeviating purpose, etc. Again, the seminary student is under restraint; he is allowed no contact with any but those who are in the same condition as himself, whose ideas are similar. He is permitted no outlook upon human progress and no communication with the active minds of the day, so that when he leaves the seminary he leaves it completely devoid of practical experience. He will probably not be an angel, but he will assuredly not be a full-grown man normally developed.

And this is what I would make my last word. If it be true, as it is notorious, that the seminarist enters the priesthood without any knowledge of the realities of life, or of his own state of bondage, or of the real mind of the Church of Rome; if, in the education he has had, everything combines to enslave his understanding, and to vitiate it in its desire to exercise the liberty and free-will which are the making of a man; if all that is done is to fashion beings who shall become fanatics or sceptics, mere wheels in a machine of oppression and of obscurantism: then would that clerical schools and private seminaries might no longer exist!

Would that every son of France, lay and clerical, might receive the same education! Would that they might grow up together side by side, first in public schools, and then in Universities, for then we should see the ranks of the clergy grow more enlightened. More enlightened, because the more that young men are brought into contact with the ideas of the day, the less likely are they to lose mental vitality by giving up their mental freedom.

The fetish worshipped by the Church of Rome—for the coming worship threatens to be the worship of the Papacy—the fetish worshipped by the Church of Rome will see his army of celibates dwindle away, never more to be recruited. Conscience will have no other King but Christ, and truth set free shall reign in concert with righteousness and love.

THE END

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